

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Monday 18 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

Ingrid Stitt MLC, Minister for Government Services; and

Jo de Morton, Secretary,

John Batho, Deputy Secretary, Digital and Government Services, and

Rohan Davies, Acting Chief Information Security Officer and Executive Director, Cyber Security and Digital Resilience, Department of Government Services.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. 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. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

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

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

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream and other committee members.

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

I welcome the Minister for Government Services as well as officials from the Department of Government Services. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you questions. Your time starts now.

Ingrid STITT: Thank you, Chair. I am pleased to be appearing today as the Minister for Government Services. I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to elders past and present and to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who may be joining us today.

Visual presentation.

Ingrid STITT: The government services portfolio brings together important services to Victorians as well as businesses and government as we increasingly operate in a digital world. The core purpose of the portfolio is to make it easier for Victorians to engage with government through modern services. This includes the registration of life events through Births, Deaths and Marriages, as well as the growing offering on Service Victoria. We are also driving reforms to make government internal IT procurement and accommodation services more secure and productive.

Over the last 12 months we have been focused on making life easier and more affordable for Victorian families. Through the Services Victoria mobile app and website, Victorians can now access more than 200 services. This includes the new Servo Saver feature released in October 2025, which has helped over 580,000 Victorians find cheaper fuel. We are making it easier to find savings across government, with more than 50 savings opportunities added to the popular Savings Finder. We are making life simpler for parents, with digital birth certificates when they register their child's birth. This year we also continued our focus on closing the digital divide across our state through the Connecting Victoria program, which reached an important milestone of over a thousand mobile and broadband projects completed. We have also continued our efforts to strengthen the state's cyber defences, supporting the Victorian public sector organisations to respond to 1341 cyber threat

intelligence activities and more than 232 cyber incidents affecting agencies, suppliers and the community. After a successful pilot in 2025, VicGov Chat has been deployed as a safe and secure generative AI tool to support public servants and staff with their day-to-day work. We have also supported efforts towards our net zero transition, with a 38 per cent increase in the number of zero-emission vehicles in the Victorian government fleet.

Looking to the year ahead, the state budget is investing to provide real help right now for Victorians. One of our key cost-of-living initiatives will be administering the recently announced registration rebate scheme through Service Victoria. This will provide 20 per cent back on car registrations paid for during the 2025–26 financial year, saving a driver with one car up to \$186 and a family with two cars up to \$372. In addition we are making a \$5 million investment in Service Victoria so that it can continue delivering new products and services that make it easier for people to transact with government and access the support that they need. This funding will also enable the Department of Government Services to establish an AI advisory committee to ensure that the government is receiving expert advice on how we can safely harness emerging technology trends.

The 2026–27 state budget also provides \$20 million over two years to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria to continue the registration of life events and build upon the service delivery improvements that the department has implemented over the last three years. Thank you very much, Chair, and I look forward to answering questions from the committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first 8 minutes are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Afternoon again, Minister. I am glad that the rego rebate was included in that as well as the move to digital. I want to touch on that. Earlier we were talking about the digital exclusion of ageing Victorians. I had an interesting case that you might be interested in today, and I wonder if you could help shed some light on this. The Service Victoria app – there was a conversation with regard to the rego rebate and how older Victorians or anyone that may not have access to the internet or any of the Service Victoria platforms might apply for that rebate or any of the other Service Vic offers. The exchange went like this. My electorate office asked whether a person without internet access can apply for the 20 per cent vehicle registration rebate. Service Vic replied:

The rebate can only be claimed online through the Service Victoria website or apps. Customers unable to access the Service Victoria platforms can contact the call centre for assistance to lodge an application.

My electorate office then asked:

Are you able to provide a phone number for the call centre please as the Service Victoria website does not have this option.

Service Vic replied:

Unfortunately, we are only able to offer digital services at Service Victoria. I'm really sorry, we do not have a call centre/contact number for you to call us.

A member: It sounds circular.

Jade BENHAM: It sounds very circular. You can understand that there are many, many people out in the regions who cannot do it in person – so they cannot go to a VicRoads agent – and they cannot access or they have not got the ability to do it online. Coming into my office, where I am more than happy to help them out, could be 2 or 3 hours drive. It is very inconvenient. Can you explain how digital exclusion for older Victorians and those that are remote living does not apply?

Ingrid STITT: Thank you for that question. I am sorry to hear that that was the experience because certainly we have a lot of expectation and work going on to make sure that Service Victoria is for everyone and that we are not, by virtue of the way that these services are being delivered, blocking anybody's access to important services, particularly cost-of-living measures, which the government wants to make sure everybody can access. Obviously, we do recognise through Service Victoria that whilst it is for everyone, some people may not have access to a smartphone, may not have access to the internet or might face other barriers to using digital services. That is why, importantly, we are able to support Service Victoria in a multitude of different ways, including through the digital assistant and the live chat.

Jade BENHAM: But if they have not got access to the internet –

Ingrid STITT: And also through the contact centre, which is available between 9 and 5 Monday to Friday.

Jade BENHAM: Where do we find that phone number? Because it is not on the website or the app, as I raised in PAEC last year also.

Ingrid STITT: Ms Benham, it is 13VIC – 132VIC.

Jade BENHAM: Would Service Victoria digital support staff be aware of that? Because they could not answer the question when my electorate office staff asked.

Ingrid STITT: They would absolutely be aware of that because we want to make sure that people are not facing barriers when it comes to the very important access they need for government services and also cost-of-living assistance, so it is our absolute expectation that people are receiving that information. Again – I know that I have already touched on this – that contact centre is available to assist Victorians with any of the services that they are trying to access through Service Victoria on 132VIC.

Jade BENHAM: And that is a direct phone number to Service Victoria?

Ingrid STITT: That is correct.

Jade BENHAM: And that will be able to help out anyone that is having trouble or facing barriers to access any of the rebates that Mr Riordan mentioned earlier today, including the rego rebate?

Ingrid STITT: Yes. I would just add, though, that the rego rebate that we have been discussing does not open until 1 June.

Jade BENHAM: But clearly people are getting ready for it.

Ingrid STITT: We are absolutely getting ready for it. We expect that there will be very high demand for a cost-of-living measure that I know many, many people have been giving their local members of Parliament – and I am sure you have heard this too – very positive feedback about.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. 132 VIC is the Department of Government Services. It is not Service Victoria. Is that correct?

Ingrid STITT: But it is the contact centre for the whole of Victorian government service. So if you are trying to access any of our services, either through Service Vic or any other platform, you can get assistance from the call centre.

Jade BENHAM: Well, I have just had my electorate office, who are watching this, try to call, and they could not offer assistance with Service Vic-related issues.

Ingrid STITT: Well, I am happy to defer to my Secretary of DGS to assist and supplement the information that I have given you. But we do take this very seriously. We know that there are many Victorians – and we have talked about this in other hearings that I have been with you before today about the importance of particularly seniors having access to the digital services that the government provides and having alternatives available for them. The contact centre helps not only Victorians access services but also those with vision impairment and digital limitations to complete some of their applications.

Jade BENHAM: For the whole of government, though, isn't it?

Ingrid STITT: For example, people have been supported through that call centre to apply for the eligible volunteer rebate scheme. They have also been able to apply for other types of services that the government provides through that call centre. If there are any specific constituents in your electorate who have got questions, I would be more than happy to hear directly from you, Ms Benham, and follow that up personally.

Jade BENHAM: Terrific. I am so happy to hear that. Thank you very much. I want to talk about, in the short time I have left, the difference between transactions on the Service Vic platform and activities. How many transactions, not activities, are now undertaken end to end on the Service Vic platforms in a year?

Jo de MORTON: Are you asking how many different types or how many –

Jade BENHAM: No, how many transactions – not activities, end-to-end transactions. How many transactions have taken place?

Jo de MORTON: When you talk about transactions, if you are talking about getting –

Jade BENHAM: Completed within the platform itself, not sent to an external link or agency. I am looking for transactions that have happened end to end within the Service Vic platforms.

Jo de MORTON: I am just making sure I answer correctly your definition of ‘transactions’. If you are talking about getting a government permission or registering something, there are 52 different types. But end to end, you can also do other things, like you can check the cheapest fuel price on Servo Saver, and that is end to end on the platform. So I am just wondering where you were going with that. Sorry.

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay, I am going to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you so much, Chair, Minister and officials. I am looking at page 44 of budget paper 3. I can see there is \$5 million there for the investing in Victoria’s digital future initiative, for Service Vic to deliver new products and services. Can you outline how the platform is modernising the way Victorians access government services and how it is contributing itself to cost-of-living relief for Victorians?

Ingrid STITT: Yes. Thank you, Ms Kathage. It is a great question. It probably gives me the opportunity to continue the conversation we have been having about digital access, because we are very much focused on delivering that real and practical cost-of-living support to Victorians, and the Service Victoria app is central to that effort. The \$5 million investment is about, essentially, at the heart of it, putting more time and money back into the pockets of Victorians and continuing to expand and strengthen our digital capabilities while also working hard to ensure that government services are simpler, faster and more responsive to people’s everyday needs.

Service Victoria is really modernising the way that people interact with government services by creating that simple, secure and easy-to-use digital front door. So instead of navigating dozens of separate websites across government and agencies, repeating the same information across different systems or waiting in physical queues at shopfronts or office buildings, Victorians can now access more than 200 services in one secure place at the time it suits them. This does really represent a significant shift in how government engages with the community, moving to a much more integrated user-centred model that prioritises that convenience and that accessibility. Since coming into this portfolio and being briefed by my department, I know that that is a major priority for the DGS team to continue to strengthen that, not only the services that are available digitally but Victorians’ interaction with them. That includes a wide range of everyday services, everything from renewing drivers licences and vehicle registrations through to worker checks; managing trade and professional licences; booking a fishing licence, which one of my work colleagues has just done recently – they had a very good experience with the Service Victoria app booking that fishing licence on the way to a regional fishing trip; accessing school and sport vouchers, which I know are incredibly popular; managing ambulance memberships; and checking and redeeming government rebates and concessions. We have just been talking about a couple of them – the rego one coming up, the emergency services, the volunteer rebate and the like. Having all these services together in one place does reduce that duplication. It does streamline the interactions that Victorians are having with government services, and it makes it a lot easier for people to get things done quickly and efficiently.

Importantly, the investment is not just about convenience. As we have been talking about, the importance of cost-of-living support right now cannot be overstated. Tools like Servo Saver are helping Victorians find the cheapest fuel in their community, using that real-time data, while Savings Finder is also doing a lot of heavy lifting in connecting households with concessions and rebates that they may not even be aware of. Often that can unlock hundreds of dollars in savings. These are just the sorts of practical, everyday supports that do make a difference to household budgets. This builds on the broader government initiatives, including that 20 per cent rego rebate, which will be delivered through the Service Victoria platform, ensuring that eligible motorists can quickly and easily access that entitlement without too much hassle and administrative burden. The digital delivery model also supports faster processing and more efficient distribution of the payments.

By making it easier to find and access support, Services Victoria does ensure that Victorians can claim what they are entitled to, which I am sure nobody would have an issue with on this committee, whether that is with their energy bills, their school expenses, their transport costs or other essential household needs. It is particularly important, I think, when families are under financial pressure but also time-poor that they are able to navigate government systems a lot more easily than might have been the case in the past. We are already seeing strong results. This year around 50 million customer transactions are expected through the platform, reflecting both the scale of uptake and the growing reliance on that digital service delivery.

Jade BENHAM: Was that 50 million?

Ingrid STITT: 50 million, Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Transactions or activities?

Ingrid STITT: Customer transactions, so that is a very impressive stat.

Jade BENHAM: That is an impressive stat.

Ingrid STITT: That really demonstrates that we are delivering better services while also achieving value for Victorian families and taxpayers. This additional investment will also build on that momentum. It will enable us to further improve the functionality, the accessibility and the service integration of a number of the services that are available on Service Victoria, and it also ensures that Service Victoria continues to evolve in line with community expectations. That funding is something that will enable that further policy work to be done within the department about what additional supports can be provided through the digital platform.

Lauren KATHAGE: You were mentioning rego before. How actually will the Service Victoria app process that? You were saying it was going to be quick. Are we expecting that is going to increase take-up of the rego? What other things about it are going to increase take-up? Because we want everyone to get it.

Ingrid STITT: Yes, we do, and we want to make sure that it is as seamless as possible. The Service Victoria platform will play a central role in delivering the government's 20 per cent rego rebate, and it will provide that direct and timely cost-of-living relief to Victorian households. As I mentioned, I think, earlier, it will be, for a motorist with one car, up to \$186 back per vehicle or a \$372 rebate for households with two cars. That is a significant saving that I am sure will be welcome to go back into family budgets. The applications will open from 1 June and be open until 31 July, and they will cover vehicle registrations paid during the 2025–26 financial year. We estimate that there will be around 4 million light passenger vehicles across the state that will be eligible for the rebate. So it is a large-scale initiative, and Service Victoria ensures it can be delivered efficiently, securely and at pace. The application process has been designed to be simple. Through either the app or the website, Victorians can confirm their eligibility in just a few steps. The system automatically validates information against the VicRoads data, and that really significantly reduces the need for any manual input, paperwork or follow-up processes. So that is a digital-first approach, and that not only improves the user experience but it also reduces processing time, enabling most payments to be made directly into bank accounts within a matter of weeks of the application being made.

Importantly, accessibility has been a key consideration in the design of the program, and Victorians can apply anytime from anywhere, at a time that suits them. For those who need additional assistance, support is available through the contact centre, as I was explaining to Ms Benham earlier, and also, importantly, interpreter services for those members of the community who may need support in other languages and community-based support pathways, ensuring that no-one is excluded from accessing the rebate. Delivering the rebate digitally also does strengthen integrity and security. That direct bank transfer can minimise the risk of fraud and reduce admin overheads and also aligns with that proven and trusted Victorian government delivery model.

Overall, I would say that Service Victoria is working really hard to ensure that this significant announcement and what I think is going to be quite a keenly anticipated rebate opportunity for Victorians to get money back into their households sooner – we are doing a power of work to make sure that from 1 June until 31 July 2026 that digital experience will be smooth and quick and efficient. I know from talking to not just my department but obviously members of the community that there has been a lot of interest in this initiative, and we are anticipating strong demand from 1 June onwards.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes, we are ready to help people do their applications, because it is really helpful in people's pockets to have that money back. So we are very appreciative of that, Minister. Thank you.

Ingrid STITT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. We are going to go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I am on budget paper 3, page 44. The budget refers to the establishment of an AI advisory committee. Can I ask who will be on that committee?

Ingrid STITT: Thank you. Good pickup. This is going to be an important committee. We want to make sure that as a government in adopting AI we do so with appropriate ethical considerations and appropriate guardrails and also thinking about what it means for the workforce. In particular, in the core public service we want to make sure that AI is adopted in a way that supports our public servants to be more efficient and streamlined in the work that they do, not to replace them. The committee will be established. It is a committee that I will have joint responsibility for with the minister for economic growth, because obviously outside of government there are also a lot of important opportunities for AI across the community, and I think those issues have been articulated in the recent AI strategy that the government has released.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Who will be on the committee, though, was the question.

Ingrid STITT: That will be determined in the near future. We want to make sure that there is a good mix of skills, including worker representatives, because of the issues that will no doubt arise across the workforce about the guardrails that may be necessary to consider. It will also include business representatives, but also AI expertise is going to be an important feature of that committee. This is an opportunity, but also we have to be mindful of getting it right, and that is why I think getting an expert AI committee together is a smart move and certainly something that my department, since I have come into the portfolio, have spoken to me about, and I will be working closely with Minister Dimopoulos in setting up the committee.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just to clarify your answer, though: by business representatives, do you mean AI companies?

Ingrid STITT: It has not been determined whether there will be specific companies on this committee, but I think that the intent is to make sure that there is AI expertise on the committee. Whether that is academic expertise or industry expertise has not been determined yet, but I am certainly looking forward to getting down to those details, because I think that the committee will play an important role in guiding the government's work in that regard.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The workforce side as well – what parts of the workforce would be on the committee?

Ingrid STITT: Well, there will be representation from the Victorian Trades Hall Council and a number of unions, but we have not determined the exact make-up yet.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee this afternoon. 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. The committee is going to take a short break before beginning its consideration of the energy and resources portfolio at 5:10 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.