

# CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2005–06

Melbourne — 1 June 2005

#### Members

Mr W. R. Baxter

Ms C. M. Campbell

Mr R. W. Clark

Mr B. Forwood

Ms D. L. Green

Mr J. Merlino

Mr G. K. Rich-Phillips

Ms G. D. Romanes

Mr A. Somyurek

Chair: Ms C. M. Campbell

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Forwood

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms M. Cornwell

#### Witnesses

Ms M. Delahunty, Minister for Women's Affairs;

Mr T. Healy, acting secretary;

Mr S. Gregory, chief finance officer; and

Ms S. Quek, assistant director, Office of Women's Policy; Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR** — I now welcome Mr Terry Healy, acting secretary of the Department for Victorian Communities; Ms Quek, assistant director, Office of Women's Policy; and Mr Stephen Gregory, chief finance officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

Minister, I call on you now to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes. If you cut it down we can have lots of very interesting questions.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I will fly through it for you, Chair. I am very pleased to present to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the Women's Affairs budget, but I should point out that we are not a service provider, we are an Office of Women's Policy and therefore quite different to most other departments within the broader public sector.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — The Office of Women's Policy turns women's needs into government actions by providing strategic policy advice to the government. It is not a service provider. We share the focus of the Department for Victorian Communities on supporting and strengthening communities across Victoria, and we contribute to the implementation of A Fairer Victoria by addressing disadvantage and creating access to opportunities.

The Office of Women's Policy provides whole-of-government strategic advice, and that is a substantial task. It works in partnership with all our government departments and agencies, and indeed the community. It has a responsibility to implement policy and to monitor those specific initiatives and projects. Most importantly, I think, it listens to, engages and consults with women right across Victoria — a continuous conversation.

Some key achievements are the integrated family violence strategy, which I am sure members of the committee recall we launched in 2002. In the most recent budget just announced, 2005–06, we secured \$35 million for the beginning of a brand new, multi-agency approach to family violence. That is a 50 per cent increase in current funding. You can see what is listed there, and we can talk about that later. It covers services for children, dealing with men and of course working with the justice system.

The Queen Vic centre has reopened after being in the middle of a building site. It has developed — and I know the committee is very interested in this and I am asked every year — a three-year strategic plan and a bloody good marketing strategy.

**The CHAIR** — If we promise to ask you a question on that, can you go to the next one?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — We have got the Shilling Fund and we have got the tenants. Women's leadership — 40 per cent of new and reappointments of women on government boards; a big improvement. We are conducting seminars and we have got the largest grants pool for women in leadership. In respect of the safety strategy, I just want to mention that beyond the integrated family violence strategy we have the Respectful Relationships package, which we have developed with the AFL and the second annual safety strategy forum.

Women's engagement: consulted with more women than ever before on key priority areas — 800-plus women through the annual Premier's women's summit. We have instituted community round tables at all our community cabinet meetings. They have been very successful and are being emulated by other areas of government now, which is wonderful. There is the safety forum and the wellbeing forum. Girls-2-Government is a very successful initiative which will continue next year. And of course we launched Victoria's first online consultation for working mothers with more than 1000 responses.

We have reported back through our report card for 2003–04. We have added a further 20 inductees onto the Victorian women's honour roll. We have released the work and family balance report card, and we have launched our next forward plan for 2004–07.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I would like to take you to the additional funding of \$500 000 provided for the Victorian family violence strategy. It is \$500 000 according to PAEC. You have said \$600 000, have you?

**Mr FORWOOD** — It is \$600 000, is it?

**The CHAIR** — Have you said \$500 000 for the family violence strategy?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — It depends which part you are talking about. The integrated family violence — —

**The CHAIR** — The departmental response to the committee's budget estimates questionnaire indicated that additional funding of \$500 000 will be provided for the family violence strategy. I would ask you to identify what that funding will be spent on.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Is this the \$5 million for the first round of initiatives under the family violence strategy?

**The CHAIR** — According to the briefing note I have got, it is \$500 000.

**Ms ROMANES** — It says \$500 000 extra for the policy unit.

**The CHAIR** — It is \$5 million across government is it?

According to the questionnaire response I am advised that it is \$500 000, but if you have more up-to-date figures than those that were sent through in the questionnaire, I am happy to — —

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — We launched it in 2002 and there were substantial funds.

**The CHAIR** — I am being advised it is additional funding — \$500 000 additional funding. Anyway, you tell us all the figures you want to give us on the family violence strategy.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — It is much more than \$500 000. That might have related to one specific initiative, but I do not think we want to go through all that. I think we want to start with 2002. There were three pilot projects. We had 1.5 to add family violence networkers — these are the people who are actually working on the ground, if you like, and are often the first people to reach a woman and children who have been attacked. Also 1.6 to allow men on family violence intervention orders to be directed by magistrates to behavioural change programs. This has been again a new approach to dealing with domestic violence to actually try to change their behaviour, because probably the worst aspect of domestic violence is that it is growing. We know that in terms of incidence, but there are repeat incidents and we are finding it is becoming intergenerational violence because children witness their parents being violent towards each other and sadly some of them grow up to be violent themselves.

Thirdly, there is 1.8 million to provide a private rental brokerage scheme for women leaving violent relationships. Again, rather than women having to go to refuges in a different part of town, if they can access through this program some private rental emergency accommodation, they can often stay in their own community. The kids can go to their own schools and they have family support. So that was the first, if you like, tranche of the women's safety strategy, which has now been built on with the \$35 million. I want to talk about that for a moment if I can.

The family violence new approach for an integrated response involves justice, and we are setting up new family violence courts in Heidelberg and Ballarat. We are also responding to what the police have provided in response to our women's safety strategy. They introduced the police code of conduct in August 2004. We have established stronger intervention orders for perpetrators and we have a new housing package to again take some of the violent men out of the household rather than taking away the women to refuges or cheap motels.

I stress that this is the beginning of an integrated strategy. What we have had growing up like Topsy is a series of crisis responses both within the government and non-government sectors — overworked, unable to share information and best practice or any protocols. They will soon have those protocols and we will find that this multi-agency approach should stop the repeat incidence of domestic violence. We do not want to pretend that we are going to stop the growth. In fact Boston Consulting, in doing some work on this area, suggested that there would be an increase in demand for its services over the next few years; it is part of the social environment in which we live.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, has anyone in government quantified the cost of family violence through all the different agencies of government, from domestic violence services, to women's refuges, to housing, to marital and relationship breakdown? Has anyone in Victoria ever quantified that? You may like to take it on notice. It would be an interesting figure to know.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — The Boston Consulting study looked at what it is costing in terms of whole of government. Access Economics did a study right across Australia and I think it was \$8 billion for Australia.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Two billion for Victoria.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Two billion for Victoria, yes. It goes right across the cost, through the health sector and loss of income and productivity, so it is a very extensive assessment of the economic damage that domestic violence does to our community. Of course you can hardly quantify the mental health damage, except that VicHealth has in fact tried to do that. It has said that domestic violence is the biggest cause of death and disability for women aged between 15 and 44 — the biggest cause of death and disability. So you can see the quantum we are dealing with, and that is why I say to the committee that this is a 50 per cent increase, a substantial increase and investment by government, but it is the beginning of an integrated system; it is not the solution to a problem that is huge.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Just a quick follow-up on this one. In relation to the \$600 000 that is going to be spent on the men in relation to this, how much of it is going to be spent on the motel vouchers and how are you going to allocate them? Could this be seen as a reward for the perpetrators? They are getting between one and three days holiday in the local motel. Have you had concerns expressed to you from motel proprietors that they are going to get people who are highly emotional, being paid for at government expense, in their motels with no supervision?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I am glad you raised this, Bill, because we have been doing this for years and years with women; giving women motel vouchers to very cheap motels or caravans — so it is crisis accommodation. We asked the question, why should the woman and her children be dragged out of their beds and the perpetrator stays safe and sound at home with his feet up in front of the telly? Our view is, why not take the perpetrator out, allow him to think about the consequences of his actions, provided there is follow-up? Of course that is precisely what we have piloted in Ringwood. We found it extremely successful.

If I can give you some anecdotal evidence, if the men are taken out of their comfort zone it stops them in their tracks. They start to think about what they have done and perhaps take up the offer of assistance. One piece of anecdotal evidence that I heard, and which certainly rings true, is that one bloke was sent home to his mother, or said, 'I won't go to the motel; I'll go home'. He went home and he realised there that he as a child had witnessed his father bashing his mother. He only realised that he was in fact repeating that family history when he was forced out of his own home through his own violent actions and went back home to his mother.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Under what authority do you take them out? And how many do you think you will do for the \$600 000?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I cannot tell you how many we could do for \$600 000. Can I take that one on notice?

**Mr FORWOOD** — Yes, sure.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — But certainly it is part of the counselling as well. That money also involves counselling for these men, because it is the behavioural change that we are really seeking to achieve. Under what authority do we do this? The police code of conduct which began under Christine Nixon responding to our women's safety strategy. She and I chair one of the major committees that has actually produced this work. It now has wonderful training, which is now being rolled out right across the police force, so when the police are the first at the house, which they usually are, they are trained to deal with several things: firstly, calming the people down, which is usually the first concern; secondly, making sure the woman has health or other assistance as required; but thirdly, explaining very clearly to the perpetrator that this is a criminal assault and is not just a domestic.

The consequences of that action can range from a charge and then it progresses through the courts, or it may mean an invitation to be removed from the house for the safety of the woman.

**Mr FORWOOD** — So the police will be the people who decide whether they get the motel voucher or not?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — It will not be exclusively the police. We are developing a set of protocols — using this money that has been gained through the budget — so that the calls are made to determine what are the needs of

this family. As I have said, it might be the health needs of the woman or it might be residential or judicial response to the perpetrator. It depends on the circumstances of the particular incident, but certainly the police are now trained, through this police code of conduct, to make many more of those decisions than they have in the past, but firstly to make a call to the local domestic violence network or 24-hour service number, and they will be directed to respond in a certain way.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Would you make available to the committee the report of the pilot which is being run in Ringwood?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Yes.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — To follow on from Mr Forwood's question, it would be instructive to the committee to get some feedback as to the cap on these hotel vouchers. You made the point that females previously got cheap hotel vouchers. Do we have a figure on how much the vouchers would be for the perpetrators of domestic violence?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I do not think we have a cap on it. What we are offering for the men is exactly what has been offered to the women. I do not recall any stories anywhere saying we should not be taking women out of violent situations and giving them a roof over their heads. That is what we are doing with the perpetrator, so it is not luxury accommodation, it is not five-star. It is very basic, minimal and very cheap, but at least it is more secure than being in that environment in the home.

There is a gender perception about this — if it is a voucher given to a woman, it is not considered to be luxury if she is fleeing domestic violence, but if the same voucher is given to the man who is bashing her, for some reason it is seen that we are providing him with luxury accommodation. We are certainly not doing that. It is a good investment to save women and children in a one-night's accommodation in a cheap motel, to save a woman and her children a night of horror and terror — it is well worthwhile provided it is part of a broader approach to his behavioural change management, and that is the context in which it should be seen.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Provided he does not cause chaos in the motel. This is the worry, I do not think a woman is likely to.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Where would you put him, Bill?

**Mr FORWOOD** — Jail — if he thumps a woman, put him in jail.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — That is a good point, but we have to be understanding of the particular circumstances. Many women who have been bashed simply want the violence to stop. They do not always want to charge him and have him end up through the courts and in jail. There are a lot of social reasons why that might be the case, and it is very frustrating for some police officers who simply want to charge him and put him in a cell. For extreme cases, that is where they will go, but it is much more subtle, I guess, in dealing with the mechanics of domestic violence and unless she wants to charge him, sometimes we are not able to pursue that particular judicial response. It is both — it is a very fine-grained response. Of course it is a criminal assault, and if charges are laid, he could well end up in jail and that is where he belongs but when he gets out, he might repeat the violence.

**Mr FORWOOD** — If you look at pages 249 and 250 of budget paper 3 you will see that your budget for women's policy has gone from \$2.6 million to \$3.1 million and does not show under the outputs, any new initiatives, although it does show departmental savings of \$4.1 million. What are you going to do with the extra half a million and will you be required to find any savings as part of the departmental \$4.1 million savings?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — You are right, it is 2.6 up to 3.1. The short answer to that, Bill, is that we have been given further funds to monitor and coordinate this new beginning, which is the beginnings of a new integrated family violence response. Because this has not been done before in Victoria, or any other state I must say, it is the responsibility of the Office of Women's Policy and we have been funded to do that coordination and monitoring of the new reform.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Does it mean that you are putting new staff on to do this job, so what staff does the women's policy area have in the DVC?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — We still have about 14 highly skilled officers. At this stage we will be determining whether we need to put more staff on, but certainly there is a reallocation going on within the Office of Women's Policy to ensure this new reform can be monitored effectively. But of course we still also call on DVC's resources and skills as well — that is, the broader department.

**Ms GREEN** — In your presentation, Minister, you referred to the women's safety strategy. Will you detail any new initiatives for 2005–06 and their key performance indicators?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — What I would like to add is that we started off, as I said, with the women's safety strategy in 2002, which was the first of its kind in 16 years, and set up three statewide steering committees to drive this work. One I have just mentioned was chaired by Christine Nixon and me on family violence, the second one was the statewide steering committee on sexual assault, and the third one was the statewide steering committee against workplace violence.

Critical partnerships have been forged between the non-government and government agencies so we have this consistent policy and the beginnings of consistent service responsibilities. I have mentioned the Victoria Police code of conduct; I have mentioned the family violence network services, the home services, women's correctional service advisory work, and I have also mentioned the work that we are doing with the Australian Football League.

I have probably spoken about in some detail the bulk of the new money in 2005–06. Certainly the way that will be implemented will be across three or four portfolios. We have the job of monitoring that and making sure that it meets the targets the government has set. The information will be collected across the many portfolios of government that are drawn into this safety strategy in July 2005.

**Mr FORWOOD** — In October 2002 you announced \$363 000 as a grant to the women's centre for the development of an information hub. In your press release you said that it would develop its own web site featuring information on career options, courses, training programs for women, industrial relations changes and would be aimed particularly at women seeking to re-enter the work force and women in precarious employment, women in regional Victoria, and indigenous and migrant women. I checked the web site yesterday and none of those things is there. I wonder whether the full \$363 000 was spent? How much was spent on web development, and why was it not completed according to the original specifications?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I know that there has been a lot of interest in this centre, and that is a good thing because it is one of those iconic places and spaces for women in the state. What we had set out to achieve through the CSF grant that you mentioned was to create a capacity builder hub. We have discovered two things. Firstly, it has been slower than we expected because of the role of the trust in trying to manage and tenant a building that was surrounded by a building site. So it was slower than we expected. Secondly, we are building the partnerships which will give the information that we want to put into the community builder hub. We want to make sure that the information is both up to date and comprehensive. Certainly I would prefer it to be comprehensive and expansive before it goes onto the web site rather than being a bit minimalist. So I think there is more work to be done.

Has all the money been spent? Well, certainly money has been spent on a project worker to scope the project; also to identify where the gaps are in the project, and what further information we need, whether it is in the multicultural area or beyond, as well as to ensure that through an evaluation — which is being completed this month — we can cover what we said we would like to cover.

I do not think it is unusual to have a broad mission statement. It is certainly something that I am pushing the Queen Victoria trust on. It has to be a comprehensive capacity builder. It has to be comprehensive in the amount of information it provides. My view is that we should get it right before we put it up and women access it.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I will just follow that through.

**The CHAIR** — I need clarification on it, too.

**Mr FORWOOD** — This is primarily a web development project which should not have been affected by the fact that there was building going on around it. I guess the issue is that any web developer can develop a very comprehensive web site between October 2002 and June 2004. The question is: if all the money was spent back then — the \$363 000 which was allocated by the CSF — how are you going to finish the project? I am glad that an

evaluation is coming, and we look forward to hearing the results of it, but I think there needs to be some more clarity around this grant, how it was spent and why it did not complete the project.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Of course, this is a CSF grant and as with all CSF grants there are regular reporting milestones. My advice is that the CSF is satisfied with the progress thus far, and the amount of money that has been spent thus far.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Has it all been spent?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — No.

**Mr FORWOOD** — How much more is there to go?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I cannot tell you that. I do not have that information.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Could you take that on notice?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Yes, we would be happy to do that.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, thank you very much to you and your team and to those who joined us for the second half of this afternoon. Thank you very much for your attendance, Ms Quek; we appreciate the advice from you and your team. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you as soon as it is available, together with follow-up questions and those that you have agreed to take on notice.

**Committee adjourned.**