

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Monday 24 November 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Roma Britnell – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Trish Burrows, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services,

Bridget Noonan, Clerk, Legislative Assembly,

Robert McDonald, Clerk, Legislative Council,

Vaughn Koops, Deputy Clerk, Legislative Assembly, and

Anne Sargent, Deputy Clerk, Legislative Council, Parliament of Victoria.

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 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government achieved in 2024–25 compared to what the government planned to achieve.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, any comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

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 Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services Trish Burrows as well as other officials who have joined us here today. Secretary, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

Trish BURROWS: Thank you. We are going to share the presentation, so Bridget is kicking off.

Bridget NOONAN: Thanks very much, Chair and members. My colleagues and I are joining you here today for this hearing on Wurundjeri country. On behalf of my colleagues I pay respect to First Nations people from here.

Visual presentation.

Bridget NOONAN: The first slide shows you how the appropriations for the three parliamentary departments and the joint investigatory committees budgets appropriated under the *Parliamentary Administration Act* are allocated to the various business units in our departments. There is a full set of financial statements in the DPS annual report, and the financial statements for my department and Robert's department are also included in the DPS annual report for clarity, even though there are, as you know, the three separate parliamentary departments and some of the information in this slide is also covered in the questionnaire, and I am sure we will come back to that during questioning.

One of the highlights that I thought it was worth touching on for members of the parliamentary committee has to do with school and student engagement. You will have noticed today coming into the building various tour groups and school activities underway. The slide highlights we are really back to, I guess, a post-pandemic peak in visitor numbers to the building, and really appreciate the opportunity to engage with members to make sure that we are hitting as many schools and students in your electorates as we possibly can.

Robert McDONALD: Another aspect of our community engagement strategy is really looking at tertiary student and teacher engagement. One of the flagship programs that the Parliament offers is the parliamentary internship program. A number of members, through the parliamentary library, take on parliamentary interns. Forty-two of those participated in 2024–25.

But another focus area has really been teaching the teachers, particularly engaging with universities and with pre-service teachers, and really giving them a good foundation in civics and parliamentary democracy so that obviously then when they go into the classroom and start teaching their students they have a really good understanding of how the Victorian parliamentary system works.

Trish BURROWS: I am going to take a little bit of time to go through some of the work with electorate offices and officers and some of the infrastructure. Here you can see, in relation to electorate offices, that the department has supported 291 onboardings over that 2024–25 period and provided end-to-end recruitment for 24. This is part of the work that has come out of the Operation Watts recommendations and the enhanced support for electorate offices, both with members recruiting but also in supporting electorate officers in the workplace as well.

As for electorate offices themselves and the leases that we take out for the 128 electorate offices, as at the end of June 2025, we had five members outside of their electorate – two fairly close to the electorate boundary, one waiting for refurbishment, one waiting for repairs to be done to a roof and one who we have not been able to find an appropriate building for in their electorate. You will see there that there are a number of leases that are constantly being extended, so there is a lot of work that is done in that property team, as well as minor works and upgrades that need to occur and simple things like broken windows that need to be fixed, trip hazards in a building itself and other matters that they take care of. In the bottom table there it talks about the number of visits from parliamentary staff to the electorate offices. In 2024–25 there were 700 separate visits by DPS staff to 128 electorate offices, which has been a change in our service delivery model over the last couple of years.

The committee hearing rooms across the road at 55 St Andrews Place are going very well. The construction is due to be finished within the next week or so. I am hoping that some open house visits might be possible before the end of the year. They will be available for committees to use from the start of the next sitting year, and the meeting rooms will be available before that of course. As for the actual committee hearing rooms, there are three committee hearing rooms. That one on the bottom there is one of the two very large ones, and there is a smaller one as well in that building, along with other features such as witness rooms and a new space for the PSO sergeant to sit as well.

The next slide is just to give you an indication about security incidents and protests that occur both on the precinct and in electorate offices. You will see that there has been a downturn during 2024–25. That really does depend on what is going on in the community as to those protest activities, particularly here at Parliament House.

My final slide is to demonstrate the work done to support the parliamentary business of Parliament, both on the regular sitting days but also committees. One of the core reasons I have included this slide is the very last row, which you will see is in relation to the broadcasting of committees. In 2023–24, while there were more committee days, we were only able to broadcast about 60 per cent of those. You will see during this last financial year, 2024–25, 61 out of the 67 were able to be broadcast live. So engagement for the community and being able to see the work that you do is an important service that is offered.

Robert McDONALD: The next slide just gives a bit of an overview of the committee activity over the past financial year. I suppose that is a large area of support from the two house departments, but also working very closely with DPS, who provide Hansard and broadcast and security and other services that go along with that. Overall over that period there were 33 reports tabled between joint committees, standing committees and select committees, so quite a lot of activity there, and 844 public hearings, which obviously is not only a workload for staff but a huge workload for members who have to attend all of these public hearings between sitting weeks. There has been a lot of engagement, direct engagement, with the community through those public hearings and, before some of those public hearings, stakeholder forums and education sessions with witnesses. The submissions – there were 2905. Fortunately, none of the inquiries over the last 12 months attracted those, I suppose, barrages of submissions that we have had for some inquiries, where you got 10,000 submissions for one inquiry, but still there was quite a significant amount of work in analysing, processing and reading all those submissions by both the members and the staff. And then there were 176 deliberative meetings held across all of the committees.

Bridget NOONAN: It occurs to me that we missed an opportunity to use a picture of this committee on that slide, but that might have been a little bit gratuitous.

The last thing we wanted to talk about in our presentation was the work of the three parliamentary departments in supporting Pacific parliaments, particularly through the parliamentary twinning program, which is auspiced by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I know various members of this committee have met with twin jurisdictions when they have been visiting, particularly with a focus on learning more about public accounts committees; that seems to be a real focus of our colleagues in Fiji, Nauru and Tuvalu at the moment. So I thank members of this committee for their contribution to that work.

I also acknowledge that a lot of our work with our colleagues in Fiji is funded through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, so this gives me the opportunity to put on record our gratitude for their support. We partner also with the United Nations Development Programme in delivering much of this work. There has been a real focus in the last year, and I think of the opportunity that Robert and I had when we were in Nauru mid-year for the presiding officers and clerks conference to meet with our counterparts and the presiding officers of those three jurisdictions. It was a really helpful opportunity just to understand more about the needs that they have on the ground and help us plan how we may go about supporting those parliaments in the next year. We have finished our presentation early, which I do not think we have ever done.

The CHAIR: Well, there are brownie points in that; do not underestimate that. But unfortunately there is no additional time for members, which leads me to – who have we got kicking off? Mr Welch? The Deputy Chair is going to go first this time.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. Can I begin by saying thank you for the work you do supporting us as members of Parliament. We greatly appreciate it. You are very professional, and we cannot say thank you enough. The documents talk about a major security upgrade at Parliament House that has been delayed by two years. First of all, I saw there were security incidents and a number, but how many of these incidents and threats have been against members of Parliament and how many have been against members of staff?

Trish BURROWS: If I can take the second part first – I can come back to you about it – the data just will not be quite as clear. For example, something that happens in an electorate office might be a phone call to a staff member who picks it up, so they record it as against them, but they are calling because it is the member's office. So it will not be a direct threat towards the member. I could get the number of those that directly reference the member; that might be data that I can pull from the system. The ones at the precinct themselves really tend to be protests on the front steps. There will be a couple of anomalies in that, but primarily it is not focused at an individual but more the Parliament as an institution.

Roma BRITNELL: So can you provide the details – not the personal details but any of the incident numbers – against either staff or members of Parliament that have occurred at the precinct and at the electorate offices as best you can, with the complexity?

Trish BURROWS: Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. Thank you. So why has this project been delayed by two years? Can you just give me an outline of what the scope of the project is and what the challenge has been that has delayed it for two years, given the significant increase we have had in issues around members of Parliament safety?

Trish BURROWS: What was funded was a suite of projects. There were a series of different activities that were funded, including the replacement of CCTV in electorate offices. That has all been completed. There is other equipment on the precinct, which has also been completed. The one that is outstanding was actually not part of the original plan when the bid for funding went in. During the course of further inquiries what was found was that there was a better way to get the solution for the perimeter of Parliament House. It being a public building, how people enter it is fairly open, but for the external part of the precinct more research was done to determine a better solution, a higher quality solution and one that is more contemporary when it comes to technology. That is what has taken so long to deliver. It took quite a while to get to what the scope was going to be. It amalgamated a few smaller things that were in the original plan to get a better outcome. We have now got a scope, we have now got a contractor on board, we have a heritage permit. That permit has a number of conditions, and we are going about solving those conditions. It does involve quite a lot of trenching to run wires throughout the precinct. So you can imagine there is an interplay with heritage, and we are working to get that closed out with the goal of having the project delivered in quarter 1 next year.

Roma BRITNELL: So the delay was that you expanded the scope but you had consultants involved to actually determine what the needs were?

Trish BURROWS: A better solution that will actually cover the whole perimeter, whereas originally it was just looking at one part of the perimeter.

Roma BRITNELL: Is there a report that can be made available to us to look at what were identified as the risks and how those will be mitigated?

Trish BURROWS: I can certainly come back to you with some information about that process that we went through and the solution that has been posed at a fairly high level – not too detailed, because it is security, but certainly enough to advise.

Roma BRITNELL: So there has been an increase in security guards around the precinct, particularly in the annexe.

Trish BURROWS: Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: Has there been an assessment done on the effectiveness of that, or is it part of that scope that that will be looked at? Was that a temporary measure? And will that be identified within this change that is being scoped out?

Trish BURROWS: That is separate to the project funding. The project funding was for capital works. That is more operational costs. That was identified as a need because in this building, with the visitor access, it is easy to get into the annexe without coming through the rear entrance. Perhaps a passholder forgot to register someone, so certainly inadvertent and potentially on purpose. The extra security officer staff at the entrance point into the annexe was after some suggestions by members as well to try and make that a bit clearer, particularly on sitting days, so that the only people coming into the annexe are those people who have been registered as visitors and are with passholders.

Roma BRITNELL: That is a fairly big change to what was in place and I imagine very costly. I am just wondering about whether that has been assessed for its effectiveness and whether that is deemed to be the most appropriate way to provide security for the precinct.

Trish BURROWS: That is the only option we have for the annexe, without constructing something across the road between the two buildings so you have to channel people through the rear. If someone brings someone in in a car and parks in the north car park, it is not possible to have that visibility to bring someone back. The only way we can manage entrance into the annexe is by having staff at those points of entry into the annexe.

Roma BRITNELL: I might just go back to the question I said before. Can you please give the information back to us regarding the incidents based on severity – how severe some of the incidents were, versus minor incidents like someone getting a phone call?

Trish BURROWS: Sure. Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary, clerks and officials for joining us today. Secretary, the department performance measures I would like to come to, but actually at the start I would also like to acknowledge and thank all of your teams and various staff this year. This year I would like to give a bit of a shout-out in particular to the broadcasting and Hansard teams, because not only do they have to listen to us all day and every day but they do amazing work in responding to members' requests. It is a very important part of our role, being able to communicate what we do in and outside the Parliament to the public.

I do note in the performance measures, to be fair, the only measure that was not met in the last financial year was the timeliness of indexes, records, speeches, video and transcripts available within the published timeframes. That was an 84 per cent outcome for an 85 per cent target. Given the importance of this work for members in representing ourselves to our constituents and our communities, what investments have you made to support the broadcast and other teams to be able to do more of these services that you have referred to in your presentation?

Trish BURROWS: On the timeliness, one of the things that impacts that timeliness is how late a sitting day might be. Of course we could keep staff for the extra couple of hours after you finish. It is more appropriate I think to have them go home and continue the next day and staff up appropriately. So quite often when we are not hitting those timelines, it is to do with very late sittings, and I am sure – well, I hope members would understand – that for the few times that happens the welfare and wellbeing of staff should be the priority in those circumstances.

To support the committee work and the parliamentary sittings, particularly I can talk about the broadcast of committees and also the uplift of broadcast infrastructure that is underway. For the broadcast of committees, there was quite a bit of investment in infrastructure kit, if you like, to enable broadcasting from non-precinct environments – simple broadcast, not as complex as we are able to do from here and certainly not the sophistication that we will have in the new committee hearing rooms. But still, to achieve that outcome of constituents being able to hear committees, it satisfies that. There is a major uplift in broadcast infrastructure to occur over the next three years or so. A report was done during the 2024–25 year to work out what needs to be upgraded and for a rolling program of upgrading that infrastructure to ensure that we can continue with the quality of broadcast and improve redundancy – less chance of it going down – and within the chamber itself, improve that as well.

Michael GALEA: That is really great to hear. You mentioned the new committee rooms as well that especially those of us in the upper house who seem to be always in committee hearings will be very excited to check out very soon. I would like to ask you about another major project that has been undertaken in the past 12 months, though, and that is the new level 3, level 4 at the back of the main building. What is going on there? Has there been a delay to that?

Trish BURROWS: There is a delay in occupancy. The works themselves on level 3 and 4 are done. The building is done. We have had an ongoing, continuous way to try and solve the issue. The issue is to do with occupancy and being able to have water pressure at the appropriate level for that building should there be a fire. We obviously have old pipes all around the building, and when they have tested that, every time it has not been able to maintain the level that is required in order to have the surveyor issue a certificate of occupancy. We have got a plan in place at the moment that is being implemented. We hope that that will solve the issue, and we will be able to maintain the pressure. We still need to replace those old pipes from other parts of the building. That is another project that will get underway in the 2026 calendar year.

Michael GALEA: Do you have an estimate as to when it will be fit for occupancy?

Trish BURROWS: I really hesitate to say. We are doing the works at the moment. If they hold, we will get the certificate and we will be in there. We are hoping that the lower ground area, which is for some parliamentary offices' work, because it does not rely on the high water pressure for level 4 will be able to be occupied, but I really want these works to happen and succeed before giving a time.

Michael GALEA: Sure. Thank you. You mentioned in the presentation as well, there has been I think around 700 visits to electorate offices and indeed a strong metric: 100 per cent of electorate offices visited, of those members that have electorate offices, throughout the financial year. What sort of feedback are you hearing from them? Are you hearing more HR concerns, more security concerns, building? How has that changed compared to previous years? Are there any particular trends that you are noticing?

Trish BURROWS: I have not actually compared it along trends since we have been recording the data as well, year on year. We started that in the 2023 calendar year; that is really when it kicked off. Lots of the visits are proactive: a property partner going out to do a check of the building, making sure that everything is in place; HR teams going out to meet with the electorate officers, making sure that there is a relationship there so if there is an issue, they can call. Resolving issues: security do need to go out to resolve issues, and IT go out often to resolve issues – the ones that are responding to those sorts of requests as opposed to the proactive stance. But that connection out to the electorate offices themselves has been a big change in the approach in having a property partner, a security partner and a HR partner to try and have a go-to rather than a sort of amoebic-type thing to get into. It has had pretty good feedback from members, but ad hoc.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. We are going to go to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Chair. Thank you, officers. Just on cybersecurity, how many cyber breaches did we have in 2024–25?

Trish BURROWS: I am pretty confident to say none, but can I take that on notice and just confirm?

Richard WELCH: Did we do we have attacks that we knew of?

Trish BURROWS: Many, many, many.

Richard WELCH: Any sort of quantum? Too many to count?

Trish BURROWS: Yes. I can come back to you with the number, but every day there are attempts to get into the network via email and through other ways as well. I hope I have not got this wrong, but I think only one in five emails comes through, for example; four are rejected.

Richard WELCH: Wow. Now, the building and our cybersecurity have got a range of challenges around the infrastructure, the technology. Even the physical infrastructure creates risks – your Operation Watts workload, et cetera. But in the report, there are no actual risk ratings for different things. So what are the current cybersecurity maturity ratings they are asking for here? Do we have –

Trish BURROWS: Yes, we do, and I can come back to you. We have a risk management framework that all three parliamentary departments operate under and a risk management committee that is, again, across all three departments. The operational risk, such as cyber, is one of those that is managed under that risk framework, which is pretty similar to most public sector agencies, where we try to have as many controls as possible in the cyber space to narrow in on that one to get that risk down to low. With those controls in place, we have up-to-date systems that sit within our IT team. We have our cyber team as well. Of course, with cybersecurity, we also rely on all the users of the network. The weakest point –

Richard WELCH: That is the weakest point, yes.

Trish BURROWS: are the people using the system, so we do try to educate as well. There was a recent session with electorate officers on cybersecurity. We have updated things over the last couple of years, including multi-factor identification. There are some different ways that you can now get into your computer, including using your face and also PINs, et cetera. We have a – I probably should not say the number, but your password is many characters long, which is another way that we try and help.

Richard WELCH: Do you do you still feel you are in an active arms race about it? Is it a moving feast?

Trish BURROWS: It is a moving feast. The cyber team are constantly learning things and responding to information that comes both from internally but also from other agencies.

Richard WELCH: And have we got contingency or redundancy programs in place so that if we have a major attack and we are disabled, we have a –

Trish BURROWS: business continuity?

Richard WELCH: strategy?

Trish BURROWS: Yes.

Richard WELCH: This is a beautiful old building, but it is an old building and it creates a range of problems. We know it needs investment. It is probably over decades. How much investment do you think it needs to bring it up to what you consider an acceptable standard?

Trish BURROWS: Well, I think it is at an acceptable standard now. As a workplace, it is appropriate and safe. We have a current program kicking off to rejuvenate areas of the building after the major works of the east wing in particular, so simple refurbishments like painting and cleaning and new carpet and those sorts of things. There is a multiyear program in play – the corridors that have not been done for a while – to rejuvenate those.

Richard WELCH: Do you think it is an adequate budget for a reasonable timeframe for these things to be addressed?

Trish BURROWS: I think all things have to be prioritised in the workplace. We obviously prioritise safety and security, and the other thing we prioritise is the core business of Parliament. So parliamentary sittings, the chambers themselves and committee hearings will always rise to the top if something needs to be done, and other things will drop down.

Richard WELCH: This is your chance to ask for more money. You could have asked for more money. With the Operation Watts recommendations, how many have been completed and how many remain uncompleted?

Trish BURROWS: The ones that were a responsibility of the Department of Parliamentary Services are ongoing; they are not something that you actually complete. For the purposes of the Victorian Ombudsman and IBAC, we do not have any more progress reports to provide to them unless they ask for one. It is ongoing conduct. So we had certain recommendations to put in place. Particularly more support for electorate officers was the key focus for DPS. We have done that. It is now about continuing that work and continually improving that. So they are done for the purposes of reporting back, but we have to keep working on it.

Richard WELCH: And that process of continual improvement – is your expectation that you will need more resources for that?

Trish BURROWS: Well, actually our funding for Operation Watts was for four years. This is the last financial year of that, so to continue on that will need to be supported.

Richard WELCH: Great. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Welch. I am going to go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, and officials. Thank you for your time, and thank you for the lovely photos in your annual report. I am thinking specifically about the photos from Charlotte's Room on pages 7 and 8. Lovely photos there with the Speaker, Kirstie and Charlotte herself. How are you finding that room's usage? Who is using it? How is it used by members, by staff, visitors? I mean, each time I go down, it is lovely. There is yoghurt everywhere, but it is great.

Trish BURROWS: The room is only available for members to use. It is not for staff to use that facility. There are members using it every sitting day and some days when they have committees. The room itself is a facility that we provide. How members use it is a matter for them. We provide the facility with safe equipment inside for them to use. But it is available for any member who has a small child that they need to support during the time that they are here doing parliamentary business.

Lauren KATHAGE: What sort of next steps are you thinking of in terms of family friendly, and how will you, I guess, seek information from members and staff about what would be helpful? I think of things like the first day of term, first day of Parliament, which is hard for little kids starting school and things like that. So how will you gather information and what plans have you got for the family-friendly improvements?

Trish BURROWS: We often rely on the Presiding Officers to give us directions in relation to what they would like to see done in the precinct itself. Of course they are engaging with members all the time, and I think from time to time the house committee also provide guidance about that, and we really respond to those requests.

Lauren KATHAGE: Okay. Are there any sort of plans or advice you have given on what you would like to see?

Trish BURROWS: Not at this time, no.

Bridget NOONAN: I think as Trish said, we will be responsive to the needs articulated to us by the Presiding Officers. They have a range of ways of gathering information from members, but they are really the conduit for us.

Lauren KATHAGE: Be careful – you know politicians love a petition, so just be careful you do not trigger one of those.

Bridget NOONAN: But we would be happy to take your feedback, directly or through the Presiding Officers, as to what you think might be helpful. That is a good point about first day of term and first day of Parliament often coinciding.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. And in terms of, I guess, then the culture that it creates, when you have a more family-friendly environment and with parents having their children here, are there any reflections on the change you have seen in Parliament based on that?

Trish BURROWS: Not from me. I defer to my colleagues.

Bridget NOONAN: Clerks never have opinions about anything, but I have observed – I have been working in the chamber a long time – and find it nice when members have their children there. There is a different tone. I think it demonstrates to members in the community that the work of a parliamentarian is a full and busy job, that the parliamentarians also have lives outside Parliament – no, okay, I will not spread that rumour – and they need to be able to juggle those commitments. I am not sure. Have you had any observations in the house?

Robert McDONALD: Yes, and I think it has been interesting, the last few weeks we have had quite a few divisions where members have brought in children that they are caring for, and I think it has actually improved the mood in the chamber certainly. I think members are very open to it. I do not think there is any resistance to it anymore. And I think seeing that side of people that you work with, you actually get to see their children, you get to know them a bit better as a person. I think it has been a really positive change.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is good. Great. And still on, I guess, developing cultures, but now cultural competency, what sort of work is being done with staff to improve their cultural competency within the precinct and when working with others?

Trish BURROWS: Anne, do you want to answer this one?

Anne SARGENT: As chair of the RAP group for the Parliament – for the parliamentary departments – this year one of our action items was to do exactly that and run cultural competency training for all staff. We, with our provider Koori Heritage Trust, have run a foundational workshop with staff this year. It was a four-hour workshop. We have actually had about 340 staff complete the training, and we have probably got another three sessions happening now to catch up on some staff that missed out. So probably by the end of this year about 400 staff will have completed a session on cultural competency training. That is really what we see as a foundational level of training within the First Peoples space. What we are then hoping to do is build on that over future years, offering staff cultural safety training and other types of training in that space but also running that foundational training each year so that when new staff start, they get that opportunity to have that training.

Lauren KATHAGE: Have there been any sort of staff champions that have stepped forward or communities of practice forming, or any sort of evidence of excitement and passion to improve things?

Anne SARGENT: Yes, definitely. We have a RAP working group which meets about eight times each year. We actually met today. Our committees group are currently doing some work with Koori Heritage Trust to run some sessions just for our committee staff at the moment, mainly about how they engage with First Peoples, especially around inquiries and things. They do a lot of work, our engagement team, and the community engagement team does as well. But it is also about how could they engage better – could they do things a bit differently? That is what they are currently working on, as one example.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. That is great.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for being here. It is a lovely way to end the first day. Can we talk about the key capital project, the total estimated investments and some of the blowouts? Can we talk about what specific factors drove a 26 per cent total estimated investment increase for the electorate office safety and security upgrade? Is that the same program – does it come under the same program as the Parliament security upgrade?

Trish BURROWS: Could you just give me a reference to –

Jade BENHAM: Sure. It is page 16, 'Parliamentary departments PAEC response'. It varies from year to year obviously, but there is no explanation for the size of the increase.

Trish BURROWS: Oh, that is actually the page – page 14.

Jade BENHAM: 14 is it? Great.

Trish BURROWS: The regional funding was over a particular timeframe and now it is a year-on-year funding. There has not been an increase in the original aspect of things, but it is year-on-year, so the total is now met over more years.

Jade BENHAM: So it is just a different way of reporting that expenditure?

Trish BURROWS: My understanding – and I will come back to make sure – is that original funding was for, say, four years and now there is funding every year. So we keep adding it to that original amount even though it is over more years – so more funding.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Have there been any electorate office safety and security upgrades that have been delayed? You said there was one electorate office you have not been able to find a suitable building for?

Trish BURROWS: Correct.

Jade BENHAM: What happens in that case?

Trish BURROWS: The member is in a temporary office here – there are three temporary offices at 55 St Andrews Place, and the member has access there. Whenever we cannot find an office in an electorate, the other option is a temporary serviced office in the electorate as well – so a member is actually in their electorate where that is available to them. Sometimes that is temporary while we are doing a fit-out as well. We just keep looking for a place. On the upgrades to security for electorate offices, primarily it was an upgrade to CCTV over time. Some of those took a little bit longer. We did not do them when we knew we were going to move someone, so it might have been slotted and then we were going to move, so we held off and did it once they had a new office, if that was going to happen in the near future. But most of the upgrade was to CCTV. The electorate office standards that came in, which most offices are fitted with now, includes that reception area with the barrier down and the ability to close the door and have electorate officers check who is coming in before they do. Security alarm systems as well all went in and are now standard for electorate offices.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. For everyone that is occupying their electorate office?

Trish BURROWS: Correct.

Jade BENHAM: Terrific. Going back to the security upgrade at Parliament House, we brushed over before what the causes were for the delay in completing the project. What were the deficiencies that were identified that forced further project scoping?

Trish BURROWS: The simple way I can say it is at the start, when the different components were put in place for the bid, the key vulnerability that was looked at was part of the fence line out here on Macarthur Street. What became clear when you really look at it from a security perspective is there are lots of vulnerabilities along the fence line, and there is technology that can alert PSOs to there being a person possibly inappropriately approaching the fence line and give them a heads-up before there is an intrusion. That is quite an investment, but it will solve the problem for the whole perimeter as opposed to one section.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, so that is what we were getting to before, where the vulnerabilities were in parts of the perimeter. So it was only those parts originally?

Trish BURROWS: Yes.

Jade BENHAM: So now we are looking at –

Trish BURROWS: The entire fence line.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, terrific; I am glad we got to the bottom of that. How many security risks remain unresolved as sort of a –

Mathew HILAKARI: Sorry, Chair, I would love to hear from the Department of Parliamentary Services maybe in a private briefing on this at one of our regular PAEC meetings – that might be more appropriate if there is a series of questions on the security of this building.

Jade BENHAM: I just want to get to the scope of the project and why it is being delayed – that is a fair answer if more things need to be done. But I think this is also part of the scope of questioning for this hearing.

Mathew HILAKARI: Certainly the finances – I have got no issue with the finances in 2024–25, but there is a series of operational matters that are being discussed, and I think it is more appropriate in a PAEC private committee hearing.

The CHAIR: Ms Benham, did you want to rephrase perhaps the question?

Jade BENHAM: Okay. We spoke earlier about incidents and threats against members and on –

The CHAIR: Apologies.

Jade BENHAM: Saved by the bell.

The CHAIR: We are going to go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Secretary and clerks. On page 27 you describe DPS participation in the CareerSeekers program, including interns who have stayed on in the organisation, a wonderful organisation. How important are these types of internship or pathway programs for building capacity and diversity in the parliamentary workforce?

Trish BURROWS: Yes, I can definitely talk about CareerSeekers. We have participated in the CareerSeekers program; this will be our third year, I want to say. In fact we had at least one of this year's interns start today, in our HR team. CareerSeekers is an organisation that supports university students – from refugee backgrounds in particular – to gain work experience through things like internships over summer and sometimes further. All different disciplines – in the past we have had someone go into our procurement team, we have had someone go into HR and IT. They come over summer; there is a designated person from DPS to support their learning throughout the time that they are here. Last year the two interns we had were fantastic – they are always fantastic – and we kept them on through to 30 June. They went back to uni, but we kept them on to do some work because they had started projects that we really wanted them to finish, particularly some data analytical work that was being done in one of our teams. We partner up with CareerSeekers to do that each year, and we have been managing to take two CareerSeekers each time; it exposes them also to the parliamentary environment and the workplace, which is an added outcome.

Meng Heang TAK: Fantastic. Also, in terms of the tours through Parliament as part of your outreach and community engagement, I see many more tours that come through Parliament during sitting weeks and non-sitting weeks. I refer to pages 15 and 17 which set out significant growth in tours, school visits and outreach, including 635 school tours and role plays and 44 regional school visits engaging close to 3000 students – that is amazing. How is the Assembly planning to manage this growing demand while keeping programs accessible to regional and disadvantaged schools?

Bridget NOONAN: That is a very good question, and thank you for recognising the work of the tours and customer service team in my department. I think we are probably at capacity in terms of what we can deliver in this building at any one time. The building is only so big and there are competing demands on the space. What we do not want to do is bring people in for a tour and say, 'Oh, but there's a function in Queen's Hall and the chamber's busy with an event and the library's got some other activity in it.' We need to be really mindful in how we use our space. That is why we have been trying in our team more and more to do visits to schools in metropolitan Melbourne and the regional visits program. We have expanded the regional visits program. We have been doing seven regional visits the last couple of years, even though our target is five. I think the fact that we are doing that within existing resources is good and a credit to the TCSU team, but we are always looking for ways where we can deliver that tour function and that school education function without necessarily relying

on the building, because my view is that we are probably at capacity in terms of the number of people we are bringing in on any regular work day. I do not know if my colleagues have any views on that, but that is probably where my thinking is at.

Meng Heang TAK: Just one supp question.

Bridget NOONAN: Yes, of course.

Meng Heang TAK: Do we see any sort of uptake in terms of the multicultural communities that have an interest in the Parliament?

Bridget NOONAN: It tends to come in waves. Sometimes where a multicultural or CALD community has engaged with Parliament, perhaps for a committee activity or some other event, that is often the best way we have got to get the word out about community engagement activities. We have tried different things with community organisations to partner with different organisations to focus our offerings on particular communities, but we are always keen to try different avenues to reach into various aspects of the Victorian community. If there is something that is particular to your electorate or you have existing networks that we can lean on, I would be very grateful to have that conversation with you or any other members.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, that would be fantastic, as always. I want to go to the regional schools program and the First Nations focus. The regional visit program has expanded to 44 schools, like you said before, across multiple regional centres. The tours and customer service unit feedback, cultural competency, as you said before, the cultural safety training with the Koorie Heritage Trust – Secretary or Clerk, how do these initiatives support the Parliament’s First Nations focus and Parliament for the people priority?

Bridget NOONAN: We are very mindful that – that was going to be a great answer.

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

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, and thank you for all the work that you do in this place and all over the community. Last year we had a conversation with you about the group and public tours of the Parliament. From some of the information that was provided to the committee on notice we learned that the DLA has begun tracking data on the groups who attend booked tours. Can I ask: did you collect language groups and disaggregate language groups as part of that data collection?

Bridget NOONAN: I do not know if we have got language groups, and I can feel my staff watching the broadcast and being angry at me for not knowing the answer to that – sorry again. We may do. I will take that one on notice, but we do track the international visitors’ country of origin, which is a correlation – a rough one – about language groups, but I will come back to you about that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. It would be great to know what other kinds of data that you are collecting. If you want, you can come back to us with that information as well. Thank you.

Bridget NOONAN: Happy to do that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you so much. I believe in that conversation last year I mentioned in passing that there is a model that exists within the National Gallery of Victoria where they have a community ambassador program which offers a range of translated programs and activities that are provided by international students, and in their instance I believe it is in Mandarin and in Cantonese. Is there scope for the department to meet with the NGV to talk about that program and consider whether something similar could be offered at Parliament?

Bridget NOONAN: I would be certainly open to that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I might move on to the Parliamentary Budget Office, looking at the performance –

Trish BURROWS: We do not represent the Parliamentary Budget Office.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Who should I direct that to? Sorry.

Trish BURROWS: The Parliamentary Budget Office.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I see. No worries, I will skip that one then. Can I ask with respect to the use of AI in the Parliament, what steps were taken within the relevant budget period to ensure guidelines were in place regarding the use of AI in the work of the Parliament?

Trish BURROWS: Yes, so we have an AI guidance document that we have had for about 12 months I want to say –

Bridget Noonan interjected.

Trish BURROWS: Maybe longer, yes. It sourced information, including from OVIC and from across Victorian government as well, to put together a principle-based approach initially, and it has been revised once since then as well, to help staff understand the importance of privacy, particularly when using publicly available AI tools. In about the middle of – I have really lost track of time – earlier this year we also commenced a trial of Microsoft Copilot with parliamentary officers. So we have about 45 licenses that different individuals but also teams are trialling and are recording and are evaluating how it is helping them with their work. So there is an opportunity to do it the way they used to do it using AI, checking of course the quality of outcomes as well for that. And that trial comes to an end early next year, and we will have a look at what the findings are for the different types of work that we do. As you can imagine, there is work for – Robert mentioned committees that are getting a lot of information in. Our finance team is managing very complex Excel spreadsheets. So in those two sort of extreme examples: how does it work? Does it assist with productivity? Can it be trusted? By having Microsoft Copilot inside our team, we have got the same protections that exist on all other Microsoft 365 products so we can manage privacy within the environment itself.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. With respect to this budget period we are examining, or even since then, how does the department view the use of AI in respect to the Parliament? Are there any particular red lines that the committee should be aware of?

Trish BURROWS: I do not think we have really discussed that far. We are really at the inquiry stage with AI, I would say.

Robert McDONALD: Yes. But I think it is one of those things that Trish mentioned about the guidance around privacy, and particularly some of our messaging, particularly with committee work. Obviously you have got confidential, in-camera submissions versus publicly available information and submissions and it is making sure you manage those in appropriate systems so that information is not disclosed that should not be or was not authorised to be disclosed or is at the appropriate time in the life cycle of that work.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Can I ask what education and training was delivered to MPs on ethical and integrity matters over the relevant budget period?

Trish BURROWS: I am going to say that is probably a question for the commission itself rather than us and also for the ethics committee and the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser. They have accountability for that sort of training.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you

Robert McDONALD: A bit like Bridget and I, others do respond to individual requests for advice. But in terms of that coordinated training, I think with the commission being fairly new and the ethics committee having an oversight role as well, we are waiting for that all to bed down.

Bridget NOONAN: I think the PIA annual report would have covered any education sessions delivered by the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser. But as Robert said, there are a number of players in the field.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, okay. So in that sense, the department does not have a visibility of the proportion of MPs, for example, that have engaged with those activities?

Bridget NOONAN: Not in a collated way, no.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Just with the remaining time I have, is there an updated costing for repairing the annexe you can provide to the committee?

Trish BURROWS: We have a lot more information about the water ingress issues in the annexe, much more detailed information. We did some temporary works, or interim works maybe rather than temporary works, during the winter break. Some of that worked very well, some not so well. We are at the stage now of deciding what scope needs to be delivered over what time, but we have not reached that conclusion yet.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Secretary. Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you. I too will ask about some works over the winter break, which were the accessible upper gallery and the glasswork that was put on the upper gallery to allow more people into the space. I know we have talked at various iterations of discussions here around access for people, particularly at question time and the line-up. It was the hottest ticket in town for a little while. I am just hoping to hear how the changes have affected those line-ups of people waiting, and what does it mean for the public?

Bridget NOONAN: I think question time is still the hottest ticket in town; I would agree with that.

Mathew HILAKARI: Are we able to use that video now?

Bridget NOONAN: I do not know if you have been into the upper gallery to see what it looks like, but it amazes me that you look at it now and there are the two rows of seating that are much more safely situated. I now cannot remember what it looked like when there were three. The team has done such a nice job on that project. It is much easier to get people in and out quickly and safely, so that has had an impact on the way people are queuing and how long it takes to move people around. I think it has been a really great project, driven by the projects team in Trish's department. Sorry, I forgot the first bit of your question.

Mathew HILAKARI: I was just checking how many people can now fit in the gallery compared to before.

Bridget NOONAN: Again, I can hear my staff getting cross at me across the broadcast. I will come back to you, because I cannot remember the specific numbers.

Trish BURROWS: It is a school class, basically. There is a different number for adults than for children, but you can fit a school class in there.

Mathew HILAKARI: A school class of kids, a half class of adults. That is good.

Bridget NOONAN: Something like that.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much. I will move to a quite a different one, which is: the department's response to recommendation 56 talks about sufficiently challenging performance targets. I am just hoping you could discuss the responses there and what that means in a practical sense. I know it is a little bit challenging. I point out we have got some really great results, like teacher satisfaction with school tours and the outreach program. You cannot get any higher than 100 per cent satisfaction, so we are doing some really great things there. How do you work through sufficiently challenging performance targets in the space that we occupy?

Trish BURROWS: Maybe just in relation to the response to it, obviously those performance measures are part of responding to DTF as well, and obviously, being part of the legislature and not part of the government, there is a fair bit of resistance to include things in there. So that is more in the response of this budgetary component of things. There is a good practice of, when a program is in place, having a plan for the delivery of that program and an evaluation of it, whether that is something like – a premier example from DPS would be the electorate officer conference. There is a whole evaluation framework which sits going into that that is then assessed afterwards. There is a target for what mark, if you like, the team have to achieve in that, and that is reviewed both on the responses from attendees as well as on budget grounds. It is really done on a program-by-program basis of trying to hit those numbers. Do you guys want to add to that?

Robert McDONALD: I think for the Department of the Legislative Council it is really hard to come up with performance measures that we, in a way, can influence and control as a department, because a lot of the activity is initiated by the house and decisions of the house or decisions of committees. So to come up with quantifiable measures that are actually meaningful is quite challenging. Some of our measures measure timeliness and accuracy. We do have some regarding committee member satisfaction with some of the activities that we do, but otherwise, in terms of volume of work, it is not determined by us. That is not something that we can commit to, so trying to come up with something that is meaningful –

Mathew HILAKARI: I just want to point out some of the extraordinary work that is going on here. Hansard is a great demonstration, and broadcasting triple the number of committee hours across the course of just two years is extraordinary; ditto with the 50 per cent increase in the broadcast hours of the Legislative Assembly and Council. I am not sure if we are more longwinded than we were two years ago, but there is some really extraordinary work going on here. I just want to say my thanks to the department and all the staff, particularly the cleaning staff in the Legislative Council, who do a great job over the lunchtimes. A big shout-out to them.

Robert McDONALD: But I would not be keen to increase the broadcast hours of the Council, because that would mean increasing the length of the sittings of the Council.

Mathew HILAKARI: Some here should note that, and I will sacrifice my 48 seconds, Chair.

The CHAIR: Very good, Mr Hilakari. You are definitely getting brownie points for that – maybe an early mark. 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. I would like to thank all secretaries and officials who have given evidence to the committee today, Hansard and the secretariat. The committee will resume its consideration of the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes tomorrow, 25 November, at 9:30 am. I declare this hearing adjourned

Committee adjourned.