

# TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2018–19

Melbourne — 13 June 2018

#### Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Mr Tim Smith

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Vicki Ward

Ms Fiona Patten

#### Witnesses

Ms Lisa Neville, Minister for Police,

Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary,

Ms Kate Houghton, Deputy Secretary, Police and Crime Prevention, and

Mr Tony Bates, Lead Deputy Secretary, Police, Emergency Management and Corrections, Department of Justice and Regulation; and

Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton, and

Ms Julie Walsh, Acting Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Regulatory Services, Victoria Police.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2018–19 budget estimates.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Police, the Honourable Lisa Neville, MP; Mr Greg Wilson, the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation; Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton of Victoria Police; Ms Kate Houghton, Deputy Secretary, Police and Crime Prevention; and Ms Julie Walsh, Acting Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Regulatory Services, Victoria Police; and in the gallery is Mr Tony Bates, Lead Deputy Secretary, Police, Emergency Management and Corrections.

Any witness who is called from the gallery during the hearing must clearly state their name, position and relevant department for the record.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege.

The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, any PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Witness advisers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 10 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee. Minister.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms NEVILLE** — Thank you, Chair, and it is great to be here this afternoon to just provide an update on our investment in Victoria Police. I want to just I suppose recap a little bit about what we have been doing over the last three years and then take you to this budget. So in our first budget we invested \$226 million in PCOs into stations, as well as delivering digital radios to our regional police as well as establishing the new counterterrorism command.

In the 16–17 budget we invested \$596 million into things like body-worn cameras, the IT uplift around mobile technology, as well as uplift in our CIRT in our SOG and in our ORU and bomb squads. We also funded 300 general duties police and we also then brought that funding forward so that those 300 could be delivered in that year.

In 17–18 we then invested \$2 billion into more sworn police both for now and into the future — 2729 additional police to be delivered, and it was central to the community safety statement. That investment also included transforming how we deal with family violence, how we deal with youth through new specialist youth officers, as well as the police assistance line, the air wing, the ANPR — so a significant investment through that process.

In this budget we are investing an additional \$289 million for new capability, particularly targeting high-harm crime, serious organised crime and some additional equipment uplift as well. So all up \$3 billion, and you can see from that graph that we have uplifted. The four years of the previous government, that was the rollout of the 1700 police funding that was funded in the 10–11 budget. Our four-year average has now brought the budget for Victoria Police for those four years to a \$3 billion average and that is a 35 per cent increase in the budget of Victoria Police.

As I said, this budget invests 289, and some of the really critical parts of that are additional prosecutors, \$100 million for additional police prosecutors. This is of course on top of the additional that we provided to respond to family violence as well as some changes that have been made to the prosecution team, particularly in relation to police harm, so building a specialist capacity there.

One of the most important investments is the \$24 million that is going into serious and organised crime and also child exploitation. So this is about addressing the fact that we have a lot of this crime now occurring through the darknet, through online, through different technologies. So this provides that both additional staff as well as additional capacity and capability to respond and deal with the changing way criminals operate.

We have got \$25 million for long arms as well. That is for our ORUs and for regional stations, and this is about making sure we are well placed to respond particularly to things like active armed offenders, terrorism acts, as well as hostages and sieges.

Additional money to increase our road drug testing from 100 000 to 150 000. Out of interest, just over the weekend for the operation that was undertaken one in 14 had drugs in their system for those that we tested for drugs, so very high hits in some places of the state. It can get as good as 1 in 3, so very concerning to see the number of people on our roads with drugs in their system. More money for crime prevention — I suppose the stand-out there is that for the first time we are providing core funding to Crime Stoppers. They have received project money in the past but never core funding. Similarly with Neighbourhood Watch there is a massive uplift, and on top of their base funding they will also be getting further project money as well.

We have got significant investment in infrastructure: \$40 million to do East Melbourne. This is perhaps one of our most important police stations in Melbourne. It is the one that responds to Bourke Street and Flinders Street. They are on the ground; they respond very quickly. We need to keep that East Melbourne station in the CBD, and that is what this money does. This is as well as money to purchase land for a new Point Cook police station. We have got additional rollout of our bollards and security CCTV across the CBD — \$40 million — and of course money for mobile police stations, mobile command centres.

It is important when we look at these budget investments that we see them in the context of the *Community Safety Statement*. This was a deliberate strategy. It is taken from the New Zealand model. It is about a partnership agreement between police and government — what we will invest and what police will deliver. At the end the goal is how we deliver a safer community, so looking at laws, investment, resources, powers — all of that put together in a coherent, consistent way that is about delivering particular outcomes that are also articulated there. That is what backed up the \$2 billion of investment or drove that. It is basically what government will do and therefore what police will do as a result of that investment.

I think perhaps the biggest change we are seeing out of the investments we are making is in relation to funding of sworn police. How are we doing that in future? That is through the staff allocation model. If we just go to the next slide, the staff allocation model, this shows you the sort of uplift that we are seeing since 15–16 in our staff positions. This is a significant increase based on a model that is telling us how many police we need based on crime stats, based on population growth, based on different types of crime, types like family violence, based on how much time is involved and based on regional factors like travel et cetera — so how many police do we need and where should they then be allocated. And that is the model that distributed the first 300 and is distributing the next round — the 825 that are about to come out over this 12-month period.

If we go on to the next slide, that also shows you that over the last four years we have funded 4000 new positions within Victoria Police. Of that, 3300 of those are sworn police positions. It is the biggest uplift in their history in terms of police numbers. Over 1000 sworn officers have come out on the street since November 2014, and that is of course on top of attrition. It is really important to note that when we started, attrition was running at just over 3 per cent. It is now down to 2.17 per cent, so one of the lowest attrition rates we have seen in Victoria Police. I think that is partly a testament to the fact that there are more resources — less pressure — on a lot of our police officers out in communities.

We have also of course funded the 400 PCOs, and we have also got the PSO mobile strike teams that are out doing both the night network on our train stations but also across our hotspots on our transport network. Additional VPS staff include our CT analysts, the forensic staff and crime specialists in crime command — so a major uplift right across the board for Victoria Police.

This shows you, I suppose, the benefit of investing in more police. As you can see, we had that six-year increase in crime, which hit its peak in 2016, with the biggest decline last year in crime for over a decade. So this is a result of both the sort of targeting of the resources — where they are going — as well as gang squads, the intelligence system, mobile technology, more police. All of this is about driving down that crime as well as providing new powers and laws to assist police to do that, and it is a testament, I think, to the efforts of Victoria Police members that we see this reversal and their ability to have identified what they needed and to use that investment in a way that has really driven down this crime.

This, the next one, is just probably a starker picture. It has been a while since we have had negative growth in terms of crime rate. We say a decade; I think in fact it is the biggest since LEAP was collected 25 years ago. You can see it across property deception crime down 13.8 per cent, aggravated burglary is 11.7, serious assaults down 5.8, aggravated robberies down 1.4 and theft of motor vehicles 23.1 per cent — so a significant decline. Crimes against the person remain about stable — a 0.6 increase largely related to historical sexual assaults being investigated and charged as well as some of the new categories, new grooming categories, that we have introduced into law in terms of sexual offences against children. So these are good results. Of course on the one hand you can say, ‘This is where we want it to be’, and on the other also say, ‘We’ve got more to do’, and that is exactly what this budget, and as we see the rollout of police going forward, will do.

The next one gives you a little bit of a picture about where you are seeing the reduction in crime. The dark blue is where you have seen the bigger reduction, above the state average. The lighter blue is a reduction, and then you have got some of those smaller LGAs, those bone-colour ones, where you have had some increase, but they are off a very small population and crime base so you get a lot of variability. But of course they are also a focus of investment in some of the regional police that are about to come out as well.

The next one is an overlay — this is in Melbourne CBD — where you have got the police that have gone out, the first lot of 300 police, and in all those areas where you are getting the large ones, except for Whittlesea, because we had to wait till Mernda opened for those new police, which was earlier this year, you are seeing above average crime rates coming down, above the state average, where you have got those new police. There used to be, I think, a myth that more police equalled crime going up. In fact what it is clearly showing — and this was the intention — was more police would result in crime coming down.

Then if you have a look at the next one, this gives you a picture of where the next 825 are being deployed across the state, across every region, so we would hope to see the replication of those above average crime rate reductions as more of these police hit the beat and as more of the law’s powers and resources also hit the streets.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, I might lead off, if I may. In your presentation there is reference in there about a \$25 million investment for long arm firearms. Can you outline to the committee the rationale behind this decision and the implementation of this investment?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Yes. This is a really significant investment, one that both Victoria Police and also the police association have been keen to see. We know from, say for example, the Lindt cafe review, the siege that happened in Sydney, that having this sort of capability to be able to respond to hostage situations — to sieges, to terrorism particularly — is a really critical uplift. We already have our SOG teams, our CIRT teams with this, but particularly if you are in regional Victoria waiting for the SOG or the CIRT team to get there in the situation of a hostage or a terrorism act, it is time consuming. You have got your police officers with their handguns just not with the capability of being able to deal particularly with an armed active offender. We know that all the evidence overseas suggests that is what the greatest risk is in relation to terrorism going forward.

This is about making sure that our operation response unit — and some of you may have seen them in our car park occasionally because they come and use the facilities here because they are roaming our CBD all the time — will have access to the long arms, as well as four regional areas will also have access. That is about making sure that we can quickly deploy to particular incidents where those long arms would be needed. They will not be carried around by general duties. They will not belong to an individual police officer. They will be stored appropriately in those regions when they are not being used. This package includes money for training, money for the long arms to deliver around 520 long arms as well as some minor asset works to actually have proper storage for the long arms. There is additional training that obviously goes with using this, not just the initial training but also having to requalify regularly to be able to continue to use these long arms. This is about making sure we have got the strategic investments in the equipment that Victoria Police members need for particular new challenges as they emerge in our community.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, can you briefly outline for the benefit of the committee the current threat environment Victoria Police and members are operating under, as far as you can, and what impact that has had to leading to this decision to purchase long arm firearms?

**Ms NEVILLE** — What we know is that the threat level remains for Australia ‘probable’ in terms of terrorism. I would say that there was not an imminent risk at all — or a risk yesterday, despite some issues that were covered yesterday — but this is a probable risk. What we do know from Victoria Police, both in terms of its intelligence, the intelligence it gathers from international agencies and our commonwealth agencies, is that the risk of active armed offenders has increased, the greatest threat is from lone wolf attacks and that there is an intention and an ability — and this is why we are doing some of other work around firearm prohibition orders — to acquire these sorts of firearms, particularly high-powered rifles. In that situation when you have got your general duties police or your regional police with a handgun and you have someone with a high-powered rifle, you are both putting the community at risk as well as your police officers at risk.

But of course we took the lead in terms of the country in establishing a counterterrorism command as well, so really bringing together some of the best officers working with the commonwealth to be able to best monitor those risks, best monitor and work with international agencies through our joint counterterrorism team. We have funded that. We have also funded the establishment of the fixated threat assessment centre — already taking referrals, identifying individuals who have a potential risk of causing harm, particularly terrorism or high-casualty harm-type crimes. That has been extremely successful.

Today I was really pleased to be with the assistant commissioner who is responsible for counterterrorism, Ross Guenther, to have a look at the new forensic mobile buses that we have funded. They are specialist buses that are really a forensic hub on wheels. It is our science hub on wheels. What that means is that you can both have a command centre and you can take account of chemicals. If we are not sure it is a chemical attack, we are able to test on site chemicals whether there is a risk to the community from that or from our officers or other emergency services workers, take fingerprints on site. At the moment what needs to happen is we have got a great forensic service as part of Victoria Police, but it all has to go back to Macleod. That means that there are significant delays, particularly if it is in a regional event, a regional crime scene. They can be done within the hour, so it really makes a difference, both in terms of determining offenders, determining risk to the community and what those interventions might be. I know, for example, that with our regional forensic hubs we will be able to utilise these vehicles as well as part of the work that they do. This will be particularly focused on terrorism events — things like, say, the Black Saturday bushfire, those sort of major criminal acts which cause significant harm, and having this access to quick information helps.

**The CHAIR** — In the last minute remaining, you mentioned the training for officers in long arms. Can you outline to the committee what sort of training that would involve — briefly?

**Ms NEVILLE** — We have got a number of specialist areas both at the academy and out at Craigieburn and an ability for ongoing training in terms of the use of firearms. I have been out there myself, and it was great the first time and average the second time in the act of using them. They do five days of initial training. They then have to come back on 90 and 180-day requalification training, so it is a constant uplift in terms of their training.

**The CHAIR** — Great. Thank you, Minister.

**Mr MORRIS** — Good afternoon, everyone. I have a question for the chief commissioner. Have you read the Victorian Ombudsman’s report *Investigation of a Matter Referred from the Legislative Council on 25 November 2015*, commonly referred to as the red shirt rorts scandal?

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — On a point of order, Chair, what has this got to do with the budget documents?

**Mr MORRIS** — Are you serious? Are you going to ask us in a minute whether it is Graham Ashton or the chief commissioner?

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — You tried this last time with Martin Pakula.

**Mr MORRIS** — This is the police hearing, and I have addressed, Chair, a question to the chief commissioner.

**The CHAIR** — The Deputy Chair does not need to provide a budget paper reference in relation to his question, but I suppose, Deputy Chair, it comes down to the period. My understanding is that this report by the Ombudsman falls outside of the hearing.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chair, the report was tabled in March 2018 — well inside the current estimates period.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. I am happy for the question —

**Mr MORRIS** — So the question stands: has the chief commissioner read the report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you. Can you provide us with an update on the fresh investigation into Labor's fraud of Victorian taxpayers?

**Ms SHING** — Sorry, on a point of order, in relation to the way in which you phrased that question, you are presupposing outcomes that are not reached in that report, Mr Morris.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — What is your point of order?

**The CHAIR** — Perhaps the Deputy Chair might wish to rephrase his question.

**Mr MORRIS** — I beg your pardon? I heard some murmurings over there. I did not hear you say there was a point of order.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry. I note the point of order that was raised by Ms Shing in relation to the preamble that formed the basis of the Deputy Chair's question, and in response to the point of order raised by Ms Shing I have suggested to you, Deputy Chair, that you may wish to rephrase your question.

**Mr MORRIS** — It was in fact a one-sentence question, so I think it is a bit hard to have a preamble, but I am happy to use a slightly different form of words.

**The CHAIR** — That might be helpful.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, is there a fresh investigation into Labor's fraud of the Victorian taxpayer, and if so, can you update the committee on it?

**Ms SHING** — Again, sorry, on a point of order: 'the latest fraud upon the Victorian taxpayer'?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — What is the point of order?

**Ms SHING** — Again, are you referring to the Labor Party or are you referring to the Victorian government?

**Mr MORRIS** — It is in the context of the Ombudsman's report. I think it is pretty clear to everyone.

**Ms SHING** — No, the Ombudsman's report, for those who have not read it, relates to the Australian Labor Party and relates to the matters set out in that report which do not refer to the budget or to the estimates period.

**Mr MORRIS** — Let us have this out now. These points of order and the constant talking, talking, talking are —

**Ms SHING** — You have not been here all day, Mr Morris. How would you know?

**Mr MORRIS** — I am aware that you have been doing a lot of talking because I can actually hear; I do have ears. It may be news to you that this is actually broadcast on the web.

As I said, let us cut to the chase right to start with. This constant interruption and this constant taking of points of order is a deliberate tactic to consume time which has been allocated to the opposition. It is not acceptable. If there is a deliberate point of order, then let us hear it, but these pseudo-courtroom tactics that we repeatedly have from this member are not acceptable.

**Ms SHING** — Further to the point of order, in relation to the point that Mr Morris has raised, the substance of that report goes to matters which relate to the Labor Party and not to the Victorian government. To the extent that this has relevance to the budget period as it relates to the outputs and to the funding allocated in this budget period, then go ahead, but this is exactly what the Premier was asked and you were defeated on that point of order. What the ministers were asked was defeated on that point of order.

**Mr MORRIS** — Precisely my point, because unless Ms Shing is alleging that the laws of Victoria do not apply to the Labor Party — that may well be her position. This is a question to the chief commissioner as to whether a fresh investigation has occurred, and I am asking for an update.

**The CHAIR** — I am happy for the question to stand. I would advise the Deputy Chair that some of your commentary around your questions might not be helpful.

**Mr MORRIS** — I am sorry, I am having trouble hearing you.

**The CHAIR** — Your commentary around the questions in terms of some of your language may not be particularly helpful in terms of you seeking to ask your question, but in relation to asking the chief commissioner a question about this report and then for an update on whether there is an investigation, I am happy for that to stand.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In 2015 we received a complaint regarding the use of publicly funded electoral officers for party political roles in the 2014 state election. At that time we did investigate that matter, and after getting legal advice and having finalised the investigation, it was determined that the activity alleged did not meet the criminal threshold to warrant criminal charges. We then put the matter back to the Ombudsman, and we also wrote back to complainants in the matter to explain that.

There is not currently a fresh investigation by police into the matter. The Ombudsman did table a report in March of this year, and that, I think, is the report you are referring to.

**Mr MORRIS** — Correct. That is right.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I have read that. I have got an upcoming meeting to go and see the Ombudsman about general issues, and I am not sure whether this will come up in that meeting, but we are not currently doing anything fresh on that matter. With these types of matters — and we have had a range of them over the last several years referred to us — the rules governing the conduct do not have a lot of ‘must nots’; they tend to be ‘should nots’ and these sorts of things. That makes it hard then to get them over the criminal standard because of the way that the rules are worded, and that tends to be our major issue with these types of referrals.

**Ms SHING** — So no fraud.

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — That is not what he said.

**Ms SHING** — It did not meet the criminal standard. The criminal standard for fraud has a higher burden of proof, Mr O’Brien. You should know this after all of the work that you have put in.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you, Chief Commissioner. Given that the Ombudsman’s report is essentially new evidence into this matter, why have you not further investigated it?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — The Ombudsman, when she, in this case, releases reports, will make a referral to us if she thinks the matters are criminal and need to be reinvestigated or there is some new evidence. Currently we have not received anything of that nature.

**Mr MORRIS** — You do not regard the Ombudsman’s report as new evidence?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It just depends on whether it gets assessed against what we know so far.

**Mr MORRIS** — I guess that is what I am asking: has it been assessed?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We have not done an assessment against what is in the new document.

**Mr MORRIS** — Can I ask you why not?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Because normally with those matters if the Ombudsman regards there as being fresh matters to be investigated then she would ask us to do that. Currently she has not done that, and we have not proactively done that at this stage. That is where that is currently at.

**Mr MORRIS** — I am interested in this point. I will phrase this in a way that I think makes the issue clear — it is not intended to be inflammatory, so I just want to make that point before I say it — you do not wait for a referral before you investigate a murder; why would you wait for a referral when this is a very well-reported, highly visible public document from a senior independent officer of the Parliament?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Because in these types of cases you have a competent authority that is looking at the matter and then the competent authority makes the referrals to the various agencies that are required from any particular report. That is the manner in which these matters normally flow through.

**Mr MORRIS** — The Ombudsman's report found that \$388 000 was effectively rorted.

**Ms SHING** — No, that's not what the Ombudsman found, Mr Morris.

**Ms WARD** — No, that's not what the Ombudsman found.

**Mr MORRIS** — Are you declaring an interest, Ms Ward?

**Ms WARD** — There is no interest, Mr Morris.

**Ms SHING** — Have you read the report, Mr Morris?

**Mr MORRIS** — So it is alright to use taxpayers money to get you elected but you just wash your hands of it and say, 'No, I have no interest'?

**The CHAIR** — Order! Is there a question?

**Ms SHING** — Have you read the report? None of you have read the report, have you?

**Mr T. SMITH** — I have read the report cover to cover.

**Ms SHING** — You haven't read it.

**Mr T. SMITH** — She benefited to the tune of \$22 000.

**The CHAIR** — Is there a question?

**Mr MORRIS** — The question stands — and I am happy to repeat it if the chief commissioner did not catch it.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I think it was the question that I answered, which was that you said why wasn't it proactively looked at, as a murder would be. Was that the question?

**Mr MORRIS** — I am saying given that the Ombudsman's findings were that \$388 000 and I will say was misused rather than rorted —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Currently we have not received anything from the Ombudsman indicating that the Ombudsman thinks that that needs to be reinvestigated. That is where that is currently at, which would normally be the case.

**Mr MORRIS** — So you would not look at the report as a matter of course?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, I read the report, but we have not looked at it as from an investigative point of view — until we got something from the Ombudsman, from their legal advice.

**Mr MORRIS** — So you would not look at it from an investigation point of view unless the Ombudsman specifically requests it?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, next time I meet with the Ombudsman, it will obviously be one of the topics of conversation, because it is one of her reports to look at, but at this stage we have not received anything.

**Mr MORRIS** — No disrespect — see, it is nearly three months, or it might be more, since the report was tabled. It does seem to be taking a long time. Can I ask you, as part of the initial investigation, did you interview the Premier, and if so, how many times?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I am not aware that we interviewed the Premier. I am not aware of us having done that, but I am happy to take that on notice as a matter of accuracy and get back to you.

**Mr MORRIS** — As part of the investigation, did you interview Mr John Lenders, and if so, how many times?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Again, on the witness list, I would have to take the witness list on notice.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, given that the police minister was named in the report and some might say was a beneficiary of the scheme, can you confirm that the minister was investigated in your initial inquiries?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, the investigation did cover all of the allegations that were made as part of the referral, yes, all the allegations were investigated.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Good afternoon, Minister, Secretary, Chief Commissioner, Ms Houghton, Ms Walsh and the other staff from the department here today. Thank you for coming. I would like to talk about the community crime prevention grants, for which there is 25 million over four years. Budget paper 3, page 92 lists around 5 or 6 million dollars per year over the next four years for that program. According to the website, there has been some \$50 million provided in grants over the last say six or seven years of which around 20 million of that has been for infrastructure projects such as CCTV, alarms, lighting, plantings and planting boxes. I think there was one launched at Oakleigh a little while ago. My question is: is there any sort of holistic or longitudinal evaluation of the effectiveness of these types of grants in preventing crime and improving community safety, and whether crime has fallen in those areas where these initiatives have been put in place?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Thank you for the question. There is significant investment and continuing investment in this budget in community crime prevention grants. Certainly, in terms of the public infrastructure works, I think we have supported something like 72 projects since 2015 — \$13 million in total funding in those infrastructure projects. We require that they be developed in conjunction with local communities and with Victoria Police, because we need to make sure whatever the intervention is in those local communities it is the most appropriate in order to bring down crime. In some places, that could be CCTV coverage and we know, for example, we have done that in places like Bendigo mall where that has also connected into the police station, so they are able to use it as a broader tool around early intervention and crime prevention. But in other places it could be urban design changes which are lighting, for example, so people can safely walk to their streets, so all of that.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I know all of that.

**Ms NEVILLE** — We are trying to I suppose ensure that our investments are evidence-based locally and driven by local communities. If you have a look at the other part of our crime prevention program now, we have these community safety networks. These now involve communities, police and local government sitting at the table, developing what they think their crime issues are, key priorities, and therefore what are the projects we should support. Again, we will be testing and evaluating those projects as they come forward to make sure they have a good impact. In our graffiti program we know it is something like 90 per cent of where we have done murals et cetera that they have stopped further graffiti, so it is a really significant improvement. Certainly if you have a look at the crime statistics, you can easily see where some of our investments have gone. Both in terms of police and crime prevention added together you are looking at a significant reduction in crime, but we have factored into all of these programs an evaluation program that we do as well.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you, Minister. I hear what you are saying about working with the local area, and that was part of my question, but it seemed like it was more a pre-evaluation rather than a post-evaluation, so just hold that thought — whether there are post-evaluations at the local level and also whether there has been some collective longitudinal evaluation of the whole program. I am not criticising the program per se. I am just

asking if that is the case as to whether the sorts of things you have put in place are effective, are some more effective than others, should there be more money spent in other areas, because just like in health it is always good to prevent crime rather than cure it.

**Ms NEVILLE** — When we came to government many of the programs were about to lapse, so we gave them one year of funding and we asked Ben Carroll, now Minister Carroll, who was then the parliamentary secretary, to work on an evaluation, so to pull people together, have a look at it, look at the findings around each of those programs. That evaluation came back to government and said, ‘Infrastructure programs make a difference, in its wideranging form those community safety grants do make a difference as well, and the graffiti program’. In addition to that we have then funded these youth crime prevention grants, which have an evaluation component. We have gone with those and we have said to communities, ‘Come up with a model that works for your community and then we want to test to see if it works’.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — So, Minister, would you be able to provide to the committee those evaluation reports?

**Ms NEVILLE** — I will pull out the report that Ben did and make that available.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And anything else you can provide on that area along the lines that I have been talking about.

**Ms NEVILLE** — Yes, sure. If there is anything else that I can give you, absolutely.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you, Minister.

**Ms WARD** — Minister, can I get you to go back to your presentation, please? I thank you and Victoria Police for the work that they have done regarding crime and community safety. I see the two graphs that you have supplied. I note that in your dot points it mentions that there is a six-year crime trend that began in 2011 that has been reversed. Could you talk us through the work that Victoria Police has done to help achieve this result?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Thank you for that question. It is significant. I never want to diminish the fact that there are still too many victims in our community, but we have had for the first time in a decade crime coming down in a really significant way — 9.9 per cent. But it is importantly not just in those high-volume crimes, which of course is significant — motor vehicle theft — but it is also in the more high-harm crimes, so the aggravated burglaries, the break-and-enters, the armed robberies are all coming down as well, and they are the crimes that really impact on communities and their fear and sense of harm and leave a legacy for those communities.

I suppose I would say that there is a mix in how we have got to this point. Firstly, we have got the biggest investment in police numbers. There is no question when I first went out after becoming police minister that there were places under pressure. It takes a year to pretty much recruit someone and get them back out on the street — to train them and get them out. Being able to get those police out quickly into those really high-pressured areas where you have got the highest crime rates — so the north-west region, for example, the southern metro — those areas where you are seeing those pressures, getting them out was important to bringing crime down. Secondly, being able to give them additional tools — when I look at the iPad rollout, for example. The iPad rollout has meant that — every single PSO currently has one as the rest are rolling out as well — they have been able to pick up on people who have outstanding warrants and make arrests more quickly, stopping people really quickly from then reoffending. Being able to identify someone on the spot, not often having to let them go because somebody at the police station is busy and cannot take the call. Being able to do that in terms of that mobile technology as well as freeing up time, that has been really critical.

We have had the investment in the gangs squad, for example. That has given a greater capability in crime command to be able to work with local and regional police and change in a sense some of the ways they are operating in their operations. Working with them and with the ORU and with regional police on targeting recidivist offenders around motor vehicle theft. We have also had the new intelligence system, perhaps one of the really most significant uplifts in my view that we have had in terms of IT. The intelligence system, what used to be a manual system, now allows Victoria Police to access 110 million records that they have got on their database. So they can put in a word and it might pop up, ‘There is an offender who has been associated somewhere else’ and then get them quickly.

So what we are starting to see is not just a turnaround of the crime rate but actually some of the recidivist crime rate coming down as well, so people are unable to commit as many offences before they are arrested. I would also say to have a look at the bail figures and the remand figures — you also seeing less people being bailed and more on remand — so again some of those sentencing and bail changes are starting to have an impact as well.

**Ms WARD** — Could you also talk us through the family violence figures and how much family violence contributes to the crime rate?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Family violence, although we have seen some small improvement in family violence in terms of the crime rate — we saw a 5.9 per cent decrease in the last crime stats on family incidents — you still see family violence pretty much touch all areas of crimes against the person. So whether you are looking at assaults, whether you are looking at rape, whether you are looking at other sexual assaults, pretty much all of those will have a large percentage which are family violence-related. Overall, despite the reduction, family violence still equates to about 19 per cent of all crime in the state, so it remains a very significant impact, and for police —

**Ms WARD** — So essentially one in five crimes is a family violence crime?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Basically, that is right. So it is significant, and obviously at its worst it leads to death, leads to women and children being murdered, and occasionally men. It is a very serious crime. I think Victoria Police are called out every 7 minutes for family violence incidents. So investing in family violence specialist workers, which is what we did as part of the *Community Safety Statement*, gives an uplifted capability for Victoria Police and increased training as well, including at the academy, and means we are better placed to respond to family violence, which is helping. But we cannot underestimate it. In some places in Victoria 60 per cent of their time would be on family violence, so it is anywhere from 40 to 60. It is a big impact.

**Ms WARD** — Thank you. I understand with crime against the person, the majority of that is connected to family violence. What about property crime? How is that tracking?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Property crime is what you would call the high-volume crime. That is the crime that probably makes up most of our crime stats, and the biggest of that is theft that relates to motor vehicles, so again there is a significant reduction in both theft of and theft from motor vehicles. Theft of a motor vehicle is down 23 per cent and theft from is down 22 per cent. That has been again really relentless focus. Assistant Commissioner Bob Hill has had a particular focus on this. We re-funded the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council — they have been working with police as well, as have some of the insurance companies — we are doing new trials, we are changing the capability of police in this area, but also just a relentless focus that Victoria Police have had about this.

I would say, and it will be interesting to see whether the changes we have just made to cash for scrap metal laws — which again, we know that that drives a lot of car theft and it has certainly helped in New South Wales, the recent implementation of those laws — will help to bring that down further.

**Ms WARD** — Thefts from cars and motor vehicles is something that frustrates people, I guess, but the thing that really concerns people is aggravated burglary and break-ins. Can you talk us through where that is up to?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Again, I think, as I mentioned earlier, this is not just about bringing down high-volume crime, but actually bringing down that high-harm crime. So we have seen aggravated burglaries coming down significantly, at 11.7 per cent, and we have seen armed robberies down as well. They are small numbers but again really high-harm crimes, those jewellery store robberies et cetera are again on the reduction. So these are the burglaries, break and enters around a 15 per cent decline, so again really turning that around. A lot of that is to do with the way operations police have been operating, being able to do fingerprint turnarounds more quickly because we have funded more forensic officers — all of those things combining to be able to give police capacity to disrupt this crime more quickly and that is reflected also in recidivist offending rates coming down.

**Ms WARD** — So is there any connection that you can make then with the amount of police that are coming out, the police that are now on the beat because they have been freed up from doing paperwork? Is that really making a difference?

**Ms NEVILLE** — If you have a look at that map I showed you, those areas where we had the biggest investment of Victoria Police in that first round that are coming out, that is where you had above-state-average declines in the crime rate. There is no question that having a capability for proactive policing, preventative policing, has made a big difference. As I said, when I went out to police stations — some of those at Casey and Werribee where they were really under pressure — to see the relief now and having that greater ability to be able to get your police out in a proactive way has assisted in bringing down the crime rate.

**Ms WARD** — Now we have heard what I would call slightly excited claims of Victoria crime being like Johannesburg. Could we bring it perhaps closer to home and to comparisons that are a bit more relevant and talk about how Victoria compares with the rest of the country?

**Ms NEVILLE** — If you just take youth offending rates, for example, we are the second lowest in the country, so the only one doing better than us is the ACT. We are running at 1446 youth offenders per 100 000, whereas New South Wales is at 2700, so quite a significant difference in that. We have got less youth offenders — we had more of them to court, committing more offences — but again we have been able to start to see an improvement in that. Again that is a mix of some of the changes to the law, bail issues, longer sentencing and police being able to disrupt the crimes more quickly. That has made a really big difference in terms of youth offending rates and, as I said, it is the second lowest in the country.

**Ms WARD** — So there are things that we are doing as a state that are different from other states that are contributing to these changes — a decrease?

**Ms NEVILLE** — I was with some of the senior police from all the other states the other day when they came over for a Neighbourhood Watch meeting and they were all asking me about the police investment in numbers, what we were doing there. Definitely for them on issues like that — the uplift in technology, the intelligence system, which again is best practice and world-leading around that — they are all looking at Victoria to see how we do that.

We have also invested in that. Everything we have invested is because Victoria Police, the chief commissioner has come to us and told us, 'This is what's going to make a difference. If we have this capability we can make a difference'. That is exactly what we have been doing: funding what Victoria Police have told us they need, giving them the powers and changing the laws where we need to. I think you could say that there is a direct correlation between those investments, those changes, and the outcomes that we are seeing in terms of the crime rate.

**Ms WARD** — So it would be right to say that other states are looking to us to show them how to do it better — how to decrease our crime?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Absolutely. There is no question about that. We are showcasing a lot of what we are purchasing, what we are investing in to interstate police right now.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, just before we got cut off before — I just want to clarify — did you say that Victoria Police did or did not investigate the Minister for Police in that initial investigation?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — As part of that initial investigation we looked at all the matters that were referred to us in the complaint, and that includes investigating those individuals involved as far as whether there was any conduct that met the criminal threshold and that would have included the current minister, yes.

**Mr MORRIS** — The other matter I just want to clarify before I go on is you indicated you are meeting with the Ombudsman?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, every so often I need to obviously talk to the Ombudsman about whether there are any issues afoot. In the recommendations in that report there were not any recommendations made to Victoria Police, so it was not a matter I was going to raise with the Ombudsman when I next talk to the Ombudsman, but I do not know whether she will raise them with me.

**Mr MORRIS** — Sorry, the acoustics in this room are awful. Did you say it was a matter that you are going to raise with her?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — No, it was not going to be a matter that I was intending to raise.

**Mr MORRIS** — You do not intend to discuss this further with the Ombudsman?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — From the recommendations that were in that Ombudsman's report, they were all around needing to fix the parliamentary rules around conduct — to tighten up parliamentary rules and those sorts of things. There were not any recommendations saying that we need to take any action, so it was not a matter that I would ordinarily raise.

**Mr MORRIS** — So you do not believe it needs any further discussion?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — No, not at this point.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you. Can I ask —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Chair, I just want to clarify something for the record. It was not the Minister for Police who was under investigation; it was the member for Bellarine. Let us be really clear for the chief commissioner and for the Deputy Chair. It is inaccurate language.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dimopoulos, perhaps you can raise it in your time.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you, Chair. Chief Commissioner, apart from the individuals that I have already asked you about — Mr Lenders, the Premier, the police minister — were any Labor MPs, current or former, or indeed any of the staff involved in this issue, interviewed as part of that original investigation?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Again, I will have to take that on notice for the purposes of accuracy and come back to you with something that is accurate, just to make sure I do not get the answer wrong.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you. So just to be clear, if we can have a complete list of everyone who was interviewed in connection with this inquiry.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, I will take that on notice and I will endeavour to do that.

**Mr MORRIS** — I think it is important that we know who was interviewed if there is no further action to be taken. When you were talking about the initial investigation a couple of minutes ago you were talking about the criminal standard, and I just want to raise an issue that comes out of the Ombudsman's report. Paragraph 46 of the report says:

It may be true, as many witnesses asserted, that inaccurate time recording is accepted practice across many industries. However, this does not absolve the members of Parliament of their personal responsibilities in relation to the stewardship of public funds, in signing time sheets to authorise payments. Time sheets contain a certification requiring the member of Parliament to certify the details as correct.

The Ombudsman, in addition to saying the scheme was an artifice and it was wrong, also points to gaps in evidence, so essentially saying she was not able to pursue the investigation into the actions of Legislative Assembly members because the reference came from the Legislative Council. So there are certainly gaps in evidence there. While the Ombudsman has identified that there are gaps in evidence which jurisdictionally she was not able to pursue, she does raise the point, and it is essentially new evidence, that there is potentially wrongful and deliberate and deceitful behaviour by some Labor members of Parliament, including evidence of falsification of documents and certification, and I am just wondering why that has not been further investigated?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to what the Ombudsman said in her report, the role for the police there is whether the conduct meets the criminal threshold, and the rules governing the behaviour are written in such a way that that test cannot be met. It makes no observation about —

**Mr MORRIS** — The issue is, though, that the Ombudsman's report says there are gaps in the evidence, and there are only gaps in the evidence because she had jurisdictional difficulties investigating because the report was initiated by the Legislative Council. She was not therefore able to interview Legislative Assembly members, and they declined, en masse I believe, to be interviewed.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes.

**Mr MORRIS** — Clearly Victoria Police has the capacity to fill that gap in evidence.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — If it were possible to meet the criminal standard, but what you are looking at there is that we are not really the authority that would be looking at that issue, because the way these rules are written we simply would not get it over the threshold.

**Mr MORRIS** — But if you do not investigate, you are not going to get the evidence.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, it was investigated initially, but the behaviour —

**Mr MORRIS** — But the Ombudsman had not said at that point that there were gaps in the evidence. The Ombudsman has now said there are gaps in the evidence that she could not investigate because of jurisdictional difficulties. Those are jurisdictional difficulties that you do not have, and you are now aware because of her report that there were gaps in the evidence. So I am asking: given the gaps in the evidence why further investigations have not occurred?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Further investigations have not occurred because the way that the rules are written we cannot meet that test to say that there would be a criminal offence having occurred, which is what the police are looking at. They are not looking at the ethics of it or the behaviour —

**Mr MORRIS** — But if the gaps in the evidence are filled then —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — If there is no offence that can meet the criminal standard because of the way the rules are written, it would be likely not to matter if there were any gaps.

**Mr MORRIS** — I am not a lawyer —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Me either.

**Mr MORRIS** — and I am certainly not a police officer, but I am just struggling to understand how having not sought the evidence you can say that the standard is not met. Surely you need to investigate, assess the evidence and then make the determination, and we know there is a gap in the evidence, from the Ombudsman.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. Where the gap is in relation to the actual description of the offence that covers the behaviour —

**Mr MORRIS** — The gap is in her capacity to interview members of the Legislative Assembly, which she was not able to do.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to behaviour I am not sure; that is a matter for the Ombudsman, I guess. Our investigation looked at whether this behaviour would meet the criminal standard, and the way that the rules are currently written, which is where the Ombudsman went in her recommendations as well, were that the rules are written in such a way that we would not be able to get a criminal brief up on it.

**Mr MORRIS** — So you are saying that despite the Ombudsman's investigation, through no fault of her own, being incomplete, despite her uncovering a range of new issues that were apparently not known at the time of the initial investigation, you are saying that, further investigation is not warranted because it might not meet the standards?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, it would not meet the standard, not might not.

**Mr MORRIS** — How would you know if you do not investigate?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, it is like if there is an armed robbery occurs where there is no offence of armed robbery. It is like there is no offence — the way the rules are written there is no criminal offence that could be committed against those rules.

**Mr MORRIS** — Sorry, you completely lost me there.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, it is about, as I said earlier, if something says you should not do something, that is different to the rules saying you must not do something for the purpose of a criminal. I make no observations about the behaviour itself, or whatever; it is just the way the rules are written.

**Mr MORRIS** — So falsification of documents, certification of documents falsely, is not an offence?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — The investigation was done in relation to the rules that govern that behaviour and govern that conduct, and the way that those rules are written — and this goes again to the Ombudsman's recommendations — they are not written in a way that would really permit us to be able to deal with the matter in a criminal jurisdiction.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, the Ombudsman's report confirms that the Minister for Police was a beneficiary of this artifice. What steps have you taken to distance Victoria Police from the minister to avoid a risk of perception of compromise?

**Ms SHING** — And yet did not act in bad faith and did not derive any personal gain. They are the other findings of the Ombudsman there, Mr Morris. You cannot be selective on the findings.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Chair, on a point of order —

**Mr MORRIS** — Time is running down.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — The point of order is that the question being asked by the Deputy Chair and, with respect, some of the evidence given by the Chief Commissioner are inaccurate. The member for Bellarine was not —

**The CHAIR** — We will come back to that. Ms Shing has got some questions to ask for Ms Patten.

**Ms SHING** — What I am going to do is ask three questions on behalf of Ms Patten. If these questions could be taken on notice — so do not feel the need to give the answers now in her absence — and provided in writing, that would be great.

In the 2018 state budget the Victorian government committed \$25 million towards community crime prevention initiatives, including in relation to youth crime. Are you able to provide any more information about where these initiatives will operate and what approaches will be used to engage and retain young people? That is the first question.

The second question is as follows. Does the minister know how much the passive alert detection dog program will cost for the year 18–19, and will the funding for this program be increased in the forthcoming years?

The third question is: in budget paper 3, page 92, the budget slates an increase of \$4.3 million for new equipment and training. I imagine this includes new 'non-fatal' weapons announced in the *Age* in March 2018 — a precise date has not been given. How much will the new non-fatal weapons cost in the forthcoming years? What is the split in the \$9.3 million between equipment and funding? And is the increase mainly going towards equipment or training? For example, is it 50-50 or is it 30-70? If they could be taken on notice, that would be great.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Before I ask my question on government time, I just want to clarify my comments earlier. The member for Bellarine, who is currently obviously the Minister for Police, was not one of the 21 people named in the Ombudsman's report, so was clearly not investigated. I just wanted to really be clear about that. I do not expect the Chief Commissioner to remember every one of those people, but that is absolutely, categorically the truth.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Ms SHING** — Just very quickly, I have got three very, very quick questions for you, Chief Commissioner. It is our understanding that there was an investigation. Is that correct?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — On the matter that I was being asked — yes, that is correct.

**Ms SHING** — And it is my understanding that police investigated, including based on your evidence here today?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes.

**Ms SHING** — And it is our understanding that Victoria Police did not detect any offences.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Correct.

**Ms SHING** — That the criminal standard was not met; that is correct?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, that is correct.

**Ms SHING** — Thank you very much, Chief Commissioner.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — You are not playing to a jury, Ms Shing.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — It is important to correct the record from your slack and dodgy questions.

### **Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Minister, just to take you to organised crime, budget paper 3, page 92, outlines an important investment into organised crime. You also mentioned I think it was \$24-odd million dollars in your presentation, Minister. I will just quickly find it. You know how much it is anyway, Minister.

**Ms NEVILLE** — Yes, it was 24.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Good. I could say something about the opposition and organised crime, but I will not, Minister; I will keep going on. If you could give us a sense of what that money will be used for and how exactly Victoria Police will crack down on organised crime?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Thank you for that. There is no question organised crime needs to be taken incredibly seriously in Victoria and across the world, and in fact we are reminded of that exactly today with police having undertaken a significant operation, arresting 13 people, getting quite a large quantity of a range of drugs — from ice to GHB to steroids, ecstasy. They have also been able to find firearms, ammunition and stolen goods. Again, from what police commentary suggests, this is related to organised crime. So this is an area of crime in our state that causes significant harm. It has probably been a driver of some of the serious youth offending we have seen but also clearly a driver of those firearm crimes and drug crimes. So we have not only in our first couple of budgets funded additional capability in terms of the gang squad again being able to be used and deployed both around organised crime and serious network youth offending but we have also provided some really important uplifts in terms of legislation — so firearm prohibition orders, which came into effect at the beginning of May, and these are about making sure that those people we do not want to have guns are prevented from having guns and giving police the powers they need to be able to search at any time; new laws I mentioned before around scrap metal.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Sorry, Minister, before we move on from prohibition orders, I read something briefly in the paper last week — a report from Victoria Police — about the use of those laws. Could I ask the chief commissioner to remind me. I cannot remember the detail, but it seemed pretty significant — in the short space of time left.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, in relation to firearm prohibition orders we have, since 9 May 2018 to 5 June, issued 85 FPOs and served 53 of those 85. Items found so far include ammunition and silencers related to firearms. We also seized drugs as part of those issued orders. The types of offenders that we have targeted in those issues include outlaw motorcycle gangs, Middle Eastern crime groups, some serious youth offenders, which the minister spoke about before, and persons of interest in relation to counterterrorism investigations.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Chief Commissioner, can I just ask you something before I go back to the other legislative investments in change you have made, Minister. The minister mentioned something around the link between organised crime and youth crime. Can you give us a sense of how that works? Do they use them as runners or puppets?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to different types of offending, organised crime will use youth to facilitate that crime, particularly in relation to organised vehicle theft — that is one of the main ones — where we get cars stolen to order, and they are then provided to organised crime groups that then deal with them in relation to making money. They basically pay the young people cash at the point that they deliver the vehicles to them. That is just one example, but there are others where a lot of the running around and the dirty work, if you like, is outsourced to youth, and the benefits are going to the organised crime groups.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — So by addressing organised crime, you are also addressing youth crime incidentally.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — You take away a key driver; exactly right.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Sorry, Minister, I interrupted you with the legislative —

**Ms NEVILLE** — Just doing a recap, the cash for scrap metal, again, goes to this issue around motor vehicle theft as well, so the banning of cash for scrap metal. In this budget, as you referred to, we have got just over 24 million around the technology-enabled crime that is associated with child exploitation as well as organised crime. This is really what is occurring on the darknet. It is about making sure Victoria Police have the skilled people, enough people and the technology to really get to the heart of the darknet, which is where you are seeing firearms sold, drugs sold in large quantities as well as Bitcoin used as a mechanism around money laundering. Unfortunately some of the technology in the darknet has enabled some pretty appalling child exploitation materials as well. So it is child pornography, but you are also seeing, unfortunately, live child torture shows on as well. This is about making sure both our gangs team and our organised crime team in Victoria Police and the team that deals with child exploitation — the JACET team — are in the best position to be able to tackle this and disrupt this sort of crime.

In terms of organised crime, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission has recently put it at a cost of around about \$36 billion a year to Australia. This is something you cannot take lightly. It is something that we need to continue to be ahead of. The operations we saw — the successful ones today — are just one part of the ongoing work Victoria Police do, whether it is motorcycle gangs, Middle Eastern crime gangs or those youth network defenders. That is what they are doing each and every day, and this is the group of people probably leaving the biggest legacy in terms of harm right across the board in our community.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Minister, is there a sense in the data for the number of organised crime groups as a proportion of the crime stats? Do they make up 20 per cent of the crime stats or —

**Ms NEVILLE** — I do not know if you could break it down that way, Chief Commissioner, but certainly when you look across things like drugs, firearms and some of the serious, high-harm crimes that is where you start to get an impact of that.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — A representation, yes, but also the prevalence.

**Ms NEVILLE** — And often you can see it through the crime stats when an operation has occurred. So what will happen after this operation that has occurred today, what you will see in not the next lot of crime stats but the one after that drug numbers up and firearm numbers up. You get that reflection as a result of the activities Victoria Police undertake.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Through the system. Can I ask you, in that investment in the budget for \$24 million-odd, how does that compare historically in terms of the focus on organised crime?

**Ms NEVILLE** — I think if you combine this with the gangs squad and the other uplift from equipment to extra, special operation group members, the CIRT team, the drug squad and all of that — all of that combined — it is probably over the last three years one of the biggest uplifts in terms of the ability of Victoria Police to tackle serious and organised crime.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Chief commissioner, is it too early to get a sense of the runs on the board in that regard, whether it be through greater intelligence already or through more arrests?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Certainly the NEO Intel system, which was part of the funding, has had a huge effect in terms of dealing with organised crime already, because for the first time we have been able to have a

system that will reach into our different datasets and pull out information that we actually had there but did not actually access and did not even know it was there in relation to a number of the investigations. We have already established a number of really strong leads and in fact results on a number of major organised crime groups as a result of having that system, as well as its practical use for things like sex investigations, homicides and other matters that we have had that NEO has been enormously beneficial for. So that is certainly having an immediate impact.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — I think you referred to some of the work in the last PAEC hearings, so it is good to see a continuation of that. In fact the other thing you mentioned — sorry, I have just remembered — is not related to organised crime, but I used your quote. I went back to the transcript and I used it carefully, Chief Commissioner. It was your quote about two years ago in the February hearings about the youth crime rate in Victoria being the lowest, after the ACT, in the country. From what you said previously, Minister, I think that is still the case two years later. That is a huge improvement.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It is now published data, so it has been verified by the bureau of statistics.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — So you are obviously making very good use of the investment in police. Thank you, Minister, for your patience during that period earlier, which was unfairly levied towards you. Thanks for your time.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, going back to the Ombudsman's report, you indicated on a number of occasions in our last segment that you did not believe, effectively, that an offence of a sufficient nature or of any nature was committed. Can I ask you what is the difference between what is alleged to have occurred in this case — \$388 000 being used for purposes for which it was not intended — what is the difference between this case and the case of the former member of Parliament, Mr Geoff Shaw, who was alleged to have misused \$6838.44 under the same rules, but was in fact charged by Victoria Police?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. I just think on that matter I would have to take that on notice. I am pretty sure we did not end up proceeding with that matter, because it did not meet that same criminal threshold.

**Mr MORRIS** — My understanding is that was a decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions or his staff, not Victoria Police. As far as Victoria Police were concerned —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, and that has highlighted an ongoing problem that we have on these type of referrals. It has been consistently the case that the rules are not sufficiently tight to allow for criminal charges.

**Mr MORRIS** — So with regard to Mr Shaw, Victoria Police were happy to proceed?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I would have to take that on notice.

**Mr MORRIS** — But with regard to —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It is going back a few years.

**Mr MORRIS** — But for \$6800. In this instance we are talking \$388 000, and there is not even a further investigation on the basis of the Ombudsman's report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, there was an investigation.

**Mr MORRIS** — We have had Mr Languiller with a significant amount of money, significantly more than \$6800. We have had Mr Nardella into six figures, again misusing funds, but apparently no conclusion to the investigation and no charges?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — If you want to do something constructive in this area, tighten the parliamentary rules, because that is the great hamstring on all these matters that get referred to us.

**Mr MORRIS** — Surely it would be better to allow the courts to adjudicate this than proceed with charges against one individual but not proceed with charges or, more importantly, complete the investigation?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Each case is assessed on its merits. They are not assessed in relation to how it compares with another matter. They are all done on each individual case's merits.

**Mr MORRIS** — Well, it certainly looks like different standards to me, but what would I know? Chief Commissioner —

**Ms SHING** — It's lucky you're not the Chief Commissioner, then, isn't it, Mr Morris?

**Mr MORRIS** — And I have no aspiration to be, Ms Shing.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, what discussions have you or your chief of staff, Commander Brett Curran, had with the police minister in relation to the Ombudsman's report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I have not had any discussions with the minister whatsoever about that report, and —

**Mr MORRIS** — How about Mr Curran?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I am confident that the chief of staff would not have either, because any matters of political referrals I deal with through other parts of my office and not my current chief of staff.

**Mr MORRIS** — Well, perhaps I can phrase it another way. Have there been any discussions between you — you have just said no — or any member of your office with the police minister in relation to the Ombudsman's report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Not that I am aware of, no, and I do not talk to —

**Mr MORRIS** — Can you confirm that on notice for us?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I do not brief the minister on operational matters, unless it is a matter like a crime has just been committed of a serious nature that she needs to be aware of or it is a counterterrorism matter. We do not talk about operational matters, so I do not brief her on operational matters or progress.

**Mr MORRIS** — Can you confirm that for us on notice?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, I will take it on notice, but it is not something we do, so I am confident that it will not be the case.

**Mr MORRIS** — Can I ask you what advice you have received from your chief of staff, Commander Curran, in relation to the Ombudsman's report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I would not have received any advice from my chief of staff on the matter.

**Mr MORRIS** — You have neither sought nor received?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — No, I would not have, no.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you. Can I ask you, have you or your chief of staff ever spoken directly with the Premier in relation to the Ombudsman's report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — No.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you.

**Mr T. SMITH** — With regards to the licensing and regulation division firearms, is Victoria Police the right entity to manage the licensing and registry database?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Yes.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Sorry, I could not —

**Ms NEVILLE** — Yes.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Sorry, Chief?

**Ms NEVILLE** — So, you did not ask who it was to, sorry. So as minister —

**Mr T. SMITH** — Sorry, Minister, this is for the Chief Commissioner. Is Victoria Police the right entity to manage the licensing and registry database?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We believe it is. We have been managing it now for a long time. Yes.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Is the licensing and regulation system operated by VicPol antiquated and out of date?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — No. The system is set up to manage over 700 000 firearms, and it is a complex system but the database is getting the job done.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Could it be improved?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — All databases can be improved upon.

**Mr T. SMITH** — So that is a yes, it could be improved?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, the database is currently sufficient for the job it is doing. Your question was, ‘Could the database be improved?’. Well, all databases, including that one —

**Mr T. SMITH** — And you are satisfied with its performance?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes.

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — Chief Commissioner, you would be aware that there have recently been a number of reports in the *Weekly Times* regarding the issue of livestock theft?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes.

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — In 2017 there were 221 reported incidents of livestock theft across Victoria, the most since 2012. Could you give me an update on the current numbers of livestock theft for the year to date?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, I think I can give you that data. My data here goes back to December of 2017. Did you want to know year to date?

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — If you have got it, yes.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Perhaps if I could take the actual number on notice, because my numbers here only go to December.

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — Sure.

**Ms NEVILLE** — The crime stats come out tomorrow, so you can have a look at it then.

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — Okay, if you can take that on notice, that would be good. Could you also advise how many convictions there were from 2017 for livestock theft?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I would have to take the conviction number on notice as well. I might be able to get that to you before we finish with any luck.

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — That would be great if you can, Chief Commissioner. Also, in relation to the current Victoria Police agricultural liaison officers, the AGLOs, how many AGLOs are there currently deployed?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We have currently got 80 AGLOs —

**Mr D. O’BRIEN** — Eighty?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, around Victoria.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — And they are all fully deployed and operational?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, they are usually located in the CIBs, the CIUs, of those areas. They are detectives usually.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — With livestock theft and other rural crime being a significant issue, are you concerned that the AGLO program lacks resources and that a dedicated full-time specialist police member is required to address rural crime?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, we put the AGLO program in place a number of years ago when we did have a spike in farm crime, particularly around livestock theft. It proved to be a pretty effective model in terms of managing farm crime across the state, because what we found previously with the centrally based livestock squad was that we were not getting state-wide coverage, and often a lot of the farm theft related to livestock. You can often get a predominance in the Western District of Victoria, because that is where a lot of that livestock is, and so we were then missing the east of the state quite a lot. The AGLO system was to give us broader expertise right across the state.

We are aware of an increase in livestock theft over more recent times. Generally livestock theft can follow the farm prices of livestock, but certainly we are aware of this increase. I have asked more recently for us to do an internal review of whether this current system is the correct system, given the current increase, and whether we need to adjust it or change it. That work is being done at the moment, so I am expecting hopefully in the near future to get a report back that has a look at the current system and says either it is working okay or we need to make some adjustments to it.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry, so 'in the near future' — have you got an idea of when that review will be completed?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It would probably be in the next month or two that I would get that back I would think, off the top of my head.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Obviously with livestock thefts, a lot of thefts occur and then they take the stock interstate. How is that progressing, from a Victoria Police perspective — working with other states to actually track down both the stock and the criminals?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We certainly have got that liaison set up, particularly a cross-border relationship with New South Wales police, with our members located in both Mildura and Wodonga, but more generally we have got a relationship with the livestock squad, for want of a better term, in New South Wales police. We have also got that with the Queensland police: indeed, we do cross training with the Queensland police in this area because they are often regarded as the national leaders in this area, so we have been doing joint training to make sure our AGLOs are at that best practice standard. We are also developing at the moment more relationships with South Australia, because it is —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Could I perhaps in this very short time ask a question on notice: how many extraditions have we had from other states, say in 2017, with respect to the livestock, given that —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I will take that on notice. I do not remember any, but I will take it on notice.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I just wanted to talk about the issue of the fake roadside blood alcohol testing, which I think has been covered quite a lot in the media. I am referring to budget paper 3, page 272, where there are the performance measures, and I notice that the target for 2018–19 is still quite high — 3.5 million. The expected outcome is 1.1 million for 2017–18, and the actual for 2016–17 was around that figure. I just wonder, and I ask this genuinely, how accurate these performance measures actually are, given that we know there were 250 000 over the last five years, with some police reporting, going back as far as 15 years, that they have been doing these 'falsies' or 'ghosties' as they call them. I wondered whether these figures on page 272 are actually accurate and how you know whether they are or they are not. In particular, the last performance measure on page 272, regarding the proportion of drivers who comply with alcohol limits — there is a very high measurement there. That is the first part of my question.

The second part of the question is whether having these targets for the number of roadside blood alcohol blood testing is a wise thing and whether it has actually contributed to the problem.

**Ms NEVILLE** — I will start, and I will also ask the chief to add to that. Firstly, the 1.1 million test that is currently in the performance measures for 17–18: governments in the past have just set targets in relation to the booze and drug buses, and there is absolutely no doubt that there were no false PBTs at all at those operations.

However, the reason it has gone to 3.5, on advice from Victoria Police, is that they currently do 4.5 million tests across the state. So, yes, if 258 000 over five and a half years is too many — one too many — they easily meet the target of 1.1 and they are certainly well above the 3.5 million target. Whether there is a question around broader targets, the independent investigation will have a look at that, but I think it is absolutely reasonable. What we do know is that a Victorian who thinks they will be pulled over for drink-driving is a deterrent. The target set by the road policing experts is that we want to be able to say to Victorians, ‘Every Victorian will get pulled over — 4 million Victorians will be pulled over for alcohol testing because we know it saves lives’. We are confident that we already well and truly meet the existing target.

The next target, what we are seeing around the 258 000 over five and half years, is random, across the year and across Victoria. It is not part of operations. I think targets or performance measures play a really significant role in saving lives, and there is no doubt about that. So, yes, we have got to make sure there are no perverse outcomes out of that, but having performance measures does matter, and it does save lives. I will ask the chief to add to that. On the second one around the measures of alcohol what we know is that we have seen significant changes in behaviour around alcohol, and it is one out of 600 —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Sorry, Minister. I know you are trying to answer my question, but the Chair has given me 1 minute. There are the 250 000. Do the actual measures in the budget papers include those 250 000? Have they been taken out in terms of the actual target reach? And also my question, which the chief commissioner may want to answer, is: is this KPI of having to do so many tests actually in part causing the problem?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It is only 1.5 per cent of the tests that we are looking at at the moment. We have done a comprehensive audit on it. The actual numbers in the BP measures are not impacted by this issue because the targets in the BP measures relate to our booze bus testing, and we have not had any issue in relation to the use of these devices at booze buses, so there is no relationship between that issue and the BP measures.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — If there is any more information, Minister and Chief Commissioner, could you supply —

**Ms NEVILLE** — If there is any, we can provide it, yes.

**Ms SHING** — Thank you, Minister, and witnesses. I would just like to close off on the line of questioning which the opposition pursued earlier and take you to page 21 of the Victorian Ombudsman’s report, which quotes correspondence from you, Chief Commissioner, which indicated:

Victoria Police have assessed the claims made by the Hon. Matthew Guy, MP, and has not identified evidence to prove any criminal offence. No further action is proposed.

Have you received any information since penning that letter to lead you to another conclusion?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — No.

**Ms SHING** — Right; thank you very much for that. It is just unfortunate that we had to wait for three rounds of opposition questioning to move on from that issue where no standard was met and no offences were made out, so let us move on to crime and crime prevention.

Since November 2014, and you referred to this in your presentation, there has been a total of \$31 million invested in community crime prevention, and that is obviously to attack not just the incidence of crime but the perceptions of safety within our communities as well. Taking you to budget paper 3, page 92, through the line item ‘Community crime prevention’ and that \$25 million of funding over four years, what does that mean in actual and perceived community safety for Victoria, and what does it mean as far as infrastructure works, the Community Safety Fund, Neighbourhood Watch and Crime Stoppers again, which you referred to in your presentation, and also the aesthetic environments within which communities live and function, such as graffiti and the safety network operations throughout the state? Any and all witnesses should feel free to weigh on in.

**Ms NEVILLE** — Thank you, and I think some of that I have touched a bit on before when Sue raised it, but also we will definitely go through in detail with Fiona some of those youth prevention grants.

This \$25 million — firstly, there is 6 million of it that goes to enhancing or extending those youth crime prevention grants. So we did a number of those. We did some targeted ones. We went into communities where we had a high youth offending rate, and we said to police, to the courts, to the youth agencies, ‘Come back to us with a proposal around how you’re going to target recidivist offenders’. They have all done that, and they are all doing it in slightly different ways. That early evaluation said to us that it is making a difference, that those young people that have been targeted have either stopped or are reducing significantly their offending, so we are extending some of those programs to get some more value out of that. So again we want to stop the offending; that is what is going to ultimately keep communities safe.

The second component of that is the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund and the Community Safety Fund. This is around \$14 million. That public infrastructure fund funds CCTV cameras; there are grants of up to 250 000. But also, importantly, I was recently, for example, with the member for Oakleigh. I had been down there in the middle of last year, in 2017, and met with the —

**Ms SHING** — The member for Oakleigh is beaming audibly over my shoulder as you speak.

**Ms NEVILLE** — That is right. I met with the local police and the traders who had raised issues about Eaton Mall with me. I encouraged them to work together to develop a proposal, and they did that with council, on some measures to design to provide some additional safety and prevention issues around Eaton Mall and hoon driving. They did that, and I was very pleased to be down there again to meet with those traders, the police and the council at the time, who showed me both what they would be doing and their value, as well as to look at the success of their graffiti program.

**Ms SHING** — So it varies enormously from place to place, doesn’t it?

**Ms NEVILLE** — That is right, so that is a really —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — And the community is rapt with it, Minister. Thank you again, publicly.

**Ms NEVILLE** — So we followed through on that grant with that community. Again, as you say, it is a public facility; there is lighting. The community grants themselves from the safety fund, so again that can be local sporting groups might put up lights, they might put up screens, they might put up some other security measures, all of which is making —

**Ms SHING** — The deterrent effect would be real then.

**Ms NEVILLE** — It is a deterrent, and it also makes people feel safer. So this is about we are making people safer but we need people to feel safer as well. That Community Safety Fund has done about 499 projects, 110 of those in the last round, so they have a really big reach right across the community — small projects that can make a really huge difference.

Perhaps the most exciting things in this grant are that we are continuing our funding to the Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council, which has played a really significant role in partnership with Victoria Police in reducing car theft in Victoria, but also to Neighbourhood Watch and Crime Stoppers. As I said, it is the first time we have funded Crime Stoppers in core funding, and they will be receiving about \$700 000 a year — the first time ever — and plus they also get project money from us.

**Ms SHING** — So there is a really good business case ratio there.

**Ms NEVILLE** — Yes.

**Ms SHING** — I recall from previous evidence given to, I think, this committee — and it may well have been by yourself or by the chief commissioner — around the returns for Crime Stoppers —

**Ms NEVILLE** — Five to one.

**Ms SHING** — Right.

**Ms NEVILLE** — So, for every dollar we get five back. In their 30 years they have received nearly 931 000 calls — so it is 30 years this year — contacts and online reports, 21 000 arrests, 85 000 charges and have assisted in recovering \$212 million. And they are a very trusted voice in Victoria, so again we support them in that work. They are a very lean, small organisation supported by Victoria Police as well, so that has been a really positive investment and, I think, one that taxpayers will support but also one that will bring significant value back to the community.

**Ms SHING** — At a grassroots level how do the community support networks feed into that crime prevention work? I imagine that would vary dramatically depending on the different parts of the state and whether it is regional or suburban or metropolitan, but what are the key drivers there around the partnerships-based approach to get that better crime prevention output?

**Ms NEVILLE** — For these community safety networks, this was an initiative in the last community safety statement, and it was the first time we have really formalised a statement for communities and police — this happens every day informally, but a formal process — where we wanted to get the voice of communities about what makes people feel safer, what did they feel the biggest issues were for their communities. I know in Ballarat, for example, the local police travelled on some of the trains going to Melbourne and back talking to commuters who were residents of Ballarat, reaching out to huge numbers of Ballarat residents around what were the key things that mattered to them around community safety. That has now been formulated by Neighbourhood Watch, Crime Stoppers and police into some action plans that we will then fund in terms of those communities. So really grassroots up and police reaching out beyond perhaps their normal comfort zones in terms of doing that as well.

**Ms SHING** — It is innovative policing, I would have thought, as much as anything.

**Ms NEVILLE** — That is right. We have got six of those at the moment, and the next six come on board this year, so it will have a really big reach and really influence particularly our crime prevention interventions.

**Ms SHING** — With the time remaining, I would like to talk about family violence. Again you have indicated that it is still around 19 per cent of crime across the state and it accounts for a call-out every 7 minutes. In the context of budget paper 3, page 271, again, Minister, Chief Commissioner or any other witness, what are the achievements in relation to combating family violence? How has the organisation equipped staff, sworn and unsworn, to address not just the often high volume of work that comes with this sort of case management process but also the mental health and wellbeing of staff in a time of what is pretty extraordinary social change around talking about something that has been the subject of stigma for a really long time — too long?

**Ms NEVILLE** — We have started with funding specialist family violence staff, and that is 415 — 208 in this particular year and rolling it out. They are really upskilling — we have got a centre of family violence — working with general duties. It also frees up some of the general duties work as well. So really specialist capability, new policy, new protocols. I think 14 000 police officers have been trained as well in family violence protocols.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — The family violence units, the specialist units around the state, have been dealing with operational aspects, but in line with the royal commission findings we started the central command for family violence. We have only got a few of those central commands, and the fact that one of them is family violence is probably reflective of how important an issue it is for the community. That also looks at welfare for our staff and has psychological support officers that relate to that specialist command.

**Ms SHING** — And in the smaller communities as well — it is often a very difficult and specific set of challenges for family violence work in smaller regional communities. Is that included as part of what you are doing at an operational level?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, absolutely. One of the benefits of having the central command is we can make sure that, in relation to family violence, we get a good standard of work done across the state so that it is much more even service delivery.

**Ms SHING** — Excellent. Again, a vote of confidence and gratitude for the work of police, who often deal with such traumatic and difficult circumstances in their daily work — thank you.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chief Commissioner, I just want to ask a question that arose as a result of a couple of questions you answered particularly around the way things are managed on your side, because in this term we have had members of Parliament involved in a number of issues — obviously the former Speaker misusing almost \$40 000 worth of his allowances, the former Deputy Speaker misusing over \$100 000 worth of his allowances and the Ombudsman’s report which confirmed that almost \$400 000 had been misused. That raises an issue about how you manage the real conflict of interest or even the perceived conflict of interest that clearly arises because of your chief of staff’s status as a former chief of staff to Daniel Andrews. I am interested in how you manage that potentially real conflict of interest.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Firstly, from an operational point of view, I do not have any concerns about my chief of staff in this area. He is a very competent chief of staff, which is why I have him in that role, and in my view he does an outstanding job of providing support to me as the chief commissioner. But I am obviously aware of the perceptions that can exist, as you have highlighted, so I do take steps in my office to make sure that there is a partitioning in relation to any political-related matters that come to my office. I have a deputy chief of staff, and any of those matters are dealt with by my deputy chief of staff and not by my chief of staff. If the matter goes, for example, into crime command, which is where these types of matters are usually investigated, the deputy commissioner comes through my deputy chief of staff to me on any of those matters and not to my chief of staff. The reason for that is I am aware of those perceptions and I do not want to do anything that would do anything to suggest that it is anything more than a perception. I understand the question, but the chief of staff I have currently got, the reason that I have had him in that role for as long as I have is he does an outstanding job in supporting me. That is what I do to try and take care of the perception issue.

**Mr MORRIS** — Can you give us an indication of where the bar is set? How is the decision made to go to the chief or the deputy chief in terms of the issue?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — The matters that you have asked me about today are very much cut-and-dried matters. A letter would come from a complainant and it is related directly to political conduct or conduct of members of Parliament, for example. Those matters are very clear-cut in my mind that they will go straight to my deputy chief of staff for the reasons that I have outlined. I have not had really any matters that I can recall that have really been borderline, that I have had to really think, ‘Gee, is this or isn’t this?’. The matters that have come across my desk over the last three years have all been very clear-cut in that regard. They have either been very much matters that deal with allegations against members of Parliament or a parliamentary process — anything that looks in any way to have a political context to it. It has been pretty clear-cut so far.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Chief Commissioner, I refer to the St Kilda Beach foreshore youth gang riot in December of last year. How many charges and what types of charges have been laid following that incident?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I have not got the specific information here on charges related from that incident. I am happy to take the actual specific number, if there were any, on notice. I do not recall us having made charges from that riot —

**Mr T. SMITH** — No-one was charged?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — but if there were, I will follow up. I will get the numbers for you.

**Mr T. SMITH** — A few days after the St Kilda gang riot — I think about 19 December — a rented house was trashed and a car vandalised by a gang of youths in Werribee, a gang allegedly identified as Menace to Society. Three other houses were similarly trashed during December. How many charges and what types of charges have been laid following those incidents?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to what I think a lot of people are calling them Airbnb, or damage to short-term rental properties, there were three that have been actively investigated in Footscray, North Melbourne, Werribee. There was a Docklands rental apartment and an Altona beachfront holiday rental apartment as well. The ones you are referring to specifically I think are the ones in December, which were the Werribee Airbnb, Docklands rental apartment and Altona Beach.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Yes.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to Werribee — that property — there was extensive damage to the property. Offenders have been identified in relation to that one, and I understand that is in an evidence brief preparation phase.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I missed that, sorry — the acoustics are shocking.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I did have some more specific information in relation to those specific investigations. In relation to the Werribee incident, in December four persons of interest were arrested and interviewed. Briefs are being prepared against those people at the moment so that they can be brought before the courts. There were a number of people we also investigated in relation to that, but there is insufficient evidence to specifically tie them to specific damage in relation to the Werribee incident. There are four offenders for that that are currently waiting before the courts. In relation to the Docklands incident, I am advised that they have investigated the damage of stolen goods. They were not able to identify sufficient damage or stolen goods that we could tie to an offender. The Altona one is a beachfront holiday rental. We have identified suspects in relation to that. We interviewed three offenders, and there is an intent at this stage to try and proceed against those three offenders.

**Mr T. SMITH** — And the North Melbourne outrage on 29 April?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, there was an incident at North Melbourne. As you have indicated, the property was damaged, and we believe there were also some goods stolen on that occasion. There was extensive damage in relation —

**Mr T. SMITH** — This is the one where all the police vehicles were trashed in the street?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. We had police vehicles damaged as well. We have since identified four key offenders for that. We have interviewed those four offenders and currently we are trying to get sufficient evidence to tie them to the specific damage, and it is our intention to prepare briefs of evidence against those four.

**Mr T. SMITH** — If I could just return to the St Kilda outrage in December, there were about 200 people involved in that incident, and I just want to recap: you are saying no-one has been arrested?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I will take it on notice as to the specifics of it, but I do not recall us charging people in relation to that matter.

**Mr T. SMITH** — In terms of the trashing of a rented house in Footscray in May, could you update the committee on where that investigation is up to? Has anyone been charged following that act of lawlessness?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. In relation to Footscray in May, there was a rental property there that was damaged at a party. Two people have been charged with criminal damage, and a 19-year-old man was arrested for drunken behaviour at that time as well.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thanks. In the minute we have got left, how many unaccounted police firearms are there — this is going back to the licensing and regulation division?

**Ms NEVILLE** — None.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We do not have unaccounted police firearms. We do not have any, no.

**Mr T. SMITH** — How many firearms are unaccounted for in total?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Are you referring to the story that was in the paper?

**Mr T. SMITH** — Yes.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — There were no firearms missing in that particular matter.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Can Victorians have faith in the integrity of LRD's firearms registry database?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, I believe so. It has maintained a high level of integrity now for many years. I am aware that —

**The CHAIR** — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Police, the Honourable Lisa Neville, MP; Mr Wilson; Chief Commissioner Ashton; Ms Houghton; Ms Walsh; and Mr Bates. The committee will follow up on any questions on notice in writing. A written response should be provided within 10 business days of that request.

**Witnesses withdrew.**