

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2018–19

Melbourne — 12 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

Mr Robin Scott, Minister for Multicultural Affairs,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy Group,

Mr David Burns, Acting Executive Director, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion, and Equality,

Mr Hakan Akyol, Director, Community Participation, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division, and

Ms Anna Parle, Director, Community Resilience and Social Inclusion Branch, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
Executive Officer of Committee**

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 Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott, MP; Mr David Burns, Acting Executive Director, Multicultural Affairs And Social Cohesion, and Equality; Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy Group; and in the gallery Mr Hakan Akyol, Director, Community Participation, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division; and Ms Anna Parle, Director, Community Resilience and Social Inclusion Branch, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division. Any witness who is called from the gallery during this 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 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Mr SCOTT — Good morning. I would like to give you a brief overview of the portfolio.

Victoria is a diverse state. According to the 2016 census, over a quarter of our population are born overseas, with strong international migration testament to our economic strength, opportunities and the appeal of our multicultural society. Nearly 50 per cent of Victorians are born or have at least one parent born overseas, and we share the richness of coming from over 200 countries and speaking over 250 languages. It is clear for many of us cultural diversity starts at home. It is an integral part of our community, a point of difference and strength of the modern Victorian community.

In 2017–18 the Victorian government has continued its dedication to diversity and multiculturalism. In April 2018 the Victorian government launched, with the community, the African communities action plan, which in partnership the African ministerial working group had developed. The action plan includes over 250 actions across six priority areas — business, employment, education and training, health and wellbeing; inclusion and empowerment, leadership, cohesion and connection. We have also had the Recruit Smarter initiative, part of the multicultural policy statement, which strives to remove barriers and ensure prospective workers can get jobs with the skills, experience and qualifications they have regardless of background, gender or age. Over 35 public, private, academic and non-government organisations have been working collaboratively to develop and trial different approaches to inclusive recruitment practices in Victoria.

The government is also currently developing the anti-racism action plan, another initiative foreshadowed in the Victorian multicultural policy statement. The action plan will identify ways in which the Victorian government can work with communities across sectors to prevent and better respond to racism and racial discrimination. An early initiative of the Victorian government is working with the Jewish and Muslim community organisations to respond to issues of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Grants continue to be an area of focus, with in excess of 1000 grants being awarded so far in the 2017–18 financial year, an increase of more than 10 per cent compared to last year.

To turn to 18–19, our state's culturally diverse communities get a budget boost with new funds for local projects and festivals. The portfolio budget allocation has grown from \$24.4 million in the 14–15 financial year to \$84.6 million in the 18–19 financial year, an increase of over 300 per cent in four years. Funding in the portfolio significantly reflects the breadth of activity being led from the portfolio, spanning settlement support, social cohesion, community engagement and partnership, early action and prevention, combating extremism, and building community capacity and participation.

The budget will deliver \$43.6 million to improve multicultural community infrastructure, help migrants settle into the Australian way of life and better support our state's multicultural festivals and events. A key highlight is a \$17.1 million investment into the multicultural community infrastructure program. There is also a further \$8.6 million to respond to Victoria's first African communities action plan, which I indicated earlier is very much community developed. An additional \$1.7 million will support culturally diverse youth at risk. The budget also provides \$1.4 million to expand the multicultural festivals and events program and \$300 000 to establish Victoria's first multicultural safety ambassadors program, which will recruit respected individuals in multicultural communities to promote safer workplace practices.

Victoria leads the way in support for multiculturalism and social cohesion, ensuring that Victorians of all backgrounds can contribute and belong. This graph shows the funding output targets announced in the beginning of each budget period since 1999 and indicates the strong growth in the portfolio area. I will leave it at that, and I am happy to take questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. At the outset I will declare that I am a member of the African ministerial working group. Minister, I will lead off if I may. The budget paper reference is budget paper 3, page 102, where is listed the multicultural community infrastructure program. Can you just outline to the committee in a little bit more detail how you anticipate the expenditure on this funding will be likely used by multicultural communities in relation to better utilisation of new infrastructure?

Mr SCOTT — I am very happy to respond to that question because this is actually quite an important investment and it responds to identified needs by multicultural communities and other stakeholders. As is outlined, there is a \$17.1 million allocation in the budget over a two-year period, and this is in addition to other initiatives. The funding will support the greater use of community facilities by Victoria's diverse communities with the goal of increasing the participation of culturally diverse communities in activities and enhancing access to services.

I am sure all members in this place would visit community infrastructure that is in the hands of Victoria's multicultural community groups and the sector that is really represented by the wonderful volunteering tradition that exists within multicultural communities. This is a really important part of Victoria's multicultural tapestry, and the ability of Victorian multicultural communities to deliver the services and the volunteer work that is undertaken is fundamentally influenced by the facilities that are available. This is a grant program, so this is providing grants to community organisations for the upgrade of their facilities.

I would touch upon a couple of issues. One is that security is an important element of this program. I know members would be aware of risks that exist. The two that have been primarily identified as communities that face risks, in terms of the security and safety of their infrastructure, are the Jewish community and the Islamic community. Members would be aware — and there has been a lot of work undertaken particularly by the Jewish community — of the risks that exist to community infrastructure and religious institutions in fact as well. Community centres, synagogues and those sorts of facilities that exist in the Jewish community have the misfortune to be targeted by a number of elements within the world. It is extraterritorial as well as within here, but there are serious risks that exist, and the Jewish community particularly has made representations to the Victorian government, as I would hope they would, and also, as I understand it, this has taken place with the federal government, and they have looked at a plan to develop security.

There have also been improvements. We are working closely, so there is an investment, out of the \$17.1 million, of \$4 million to address those concerns that have been raised. I think that is a very important investment, because persons attending community and religious facilities, which are such an important part of

multiculturalism here in Victoria, should be safe and should have the confidence that in attending those facilities they are safe.

There are also risks that have been identified in terms of community facilities that service our Islamic communities. In addition to the \$4 million addressing security concerns in relation to Jewish community facilities, there is \$3 million allocated in the budget funding of \$17.1 million in terms of community infrastructure to address security concerns and ensure the safety of persons in the Islamic communities in both religious institutions and also civil society institutions beyond religious institutions, community groups facilities. Again, for persons within society, one of the fundamental needs and underpinnings of all communities is to have places where they can gather, celebrate culture, preserve and develop culture within Victoria and bring the best traditions from the societies and cultures from which they have come, whether that be language, cultural practice or intellectual traditions, and have them grow and develop within Victoria and be able to share them.

So cultural facilities form more than one function. One is of course gathering and meeting places — places where people come together — and you can see that across all of our electorates. They also provide places where there is a critical space in which culture, language and practice can be preserved within Australia. That is part of the multicultural story. But there are also places where they can be shared with the broader community and through that shared understanding and having access to those facilities there is a deeper empathy that is created and that empathy reduces the mistrust, suspicion and fear that ignorance creates.

By having people come together across different cultural backgrounds there is a reduction in the level of fear and misunderstanding, which I would hope would be a purpose for which all members of this committee, in the best traditions of longstanding support across party lines for multiculturalism — not just bipartisan, but across the major and mainstream political actors here in our society — could agree.

So in terms of the utilisation of the funding, it would be to maintain, refurbish and renovate current community infrastructure, to fund security upgrades, as I noted, particularly focused on the Jewish and Islamic communities, and to maintain and build pre-existing facilities catering for multicultural ageing populations. Community infrastructure has a particularly important role for ageing communities, particularly as language can decline. A second language can decline with the ageing process, so having places where people can gather at specific community locations becomes more important for some of our Victorian multicultural communities as persons age within those communities.

So this is a really good initiative. I think it will be something that will be welcomed because it responds to significant demand within the Victorian community, not just for the security issues that I identified, but also for community spaces more broadly. You can use examples, and I can think of organisations like Diversitat in North Geelong — I do not know if members have had the benefit of attending Diversitat. It is really a fantastic facility and it engages with more than 1000 people from culturally diverse backgrounds each week to provide training, education, community programs, aged support services, social enterprise and arts events. The organisation recently received \$211 500 through the Community Infrastructure and Cultural Precincts program for a new diversability centre to provide more sustainable, efficient and effective services. So by investing in community facilities, we get an outcome where we improve services, we allow those spaces which allow for the participation of our diverse communities and, importantly, bring it to places where people are brought together from different communities.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Thanks, Minister. Just leading off from your comments in relation to communities coming together, budget paper 3, page 102, outlines some of the investment in multicultural festivals. I think over the last few years I have noticed in my community and a bit beyond that groups invite other groups to participate. So, for example, you will have a Greek festival in Oakleigh, but they will have Chinese dancers as well. I think that was a deliberate policy in terms of funding that has encouraged groups to do that. I think festivals are sometimes, for those who are not involved, underrated. They should be far more highly rated because for those who do not have an exposure to diversity in their daily life will have it in a public space — a park or a council facility. They do wonderful things in terms of bringing people together and actually demystifying what a different culture is. Can you talk a bit about the festival investment in this budget?

Mr SCOTT — Yes, I can. There is \$1.4 million to expand funding for festivals and events programs for non-profit organisations. And this supplements existing funding. What I would say, to take up the point of the member for Oakleigh, is that there is a real cross-cultural function that festivals perform. Festivals are a really

important communicative tool. Beyond the purpose of allowing for the celebration of culture and often religion within communities, because festivals often have a religious purpose as well as a community purpose, they provide a basis of mutual understanding. The research that I am aware of and the work that has been undertaken by the department over a long period of time has shown that festivals attract very large numbers of people — and I know that some of the bigger festivals like Chinese New Year, Holi and the Glendi festival, for example, amongst others, attract many, in fact hundreds of thousands of Victorians — to participate in events. But when participating in those events there is an understanding that is generated of the culture and the value of the culture that the people are experiencing. For the community themselves who are putting on a festival it is often a celebration of heritage and a way of preserving a cultural tradition within the society, but it is very important to understand that festivals have a meaning beyond that community itself.

I have the fortune to attend a large number of community festivals and events, and I am aware that they perform this communicative function. That is advertently one of the purposes for which we are seeking festivals. One of the objectives is to foster cross-cultural awareness, understanding and respect, community unity and intercultural relationships. So by seeing the festival and celebration of another community people in effect are able in a very celebratory and engaging environment to gain a greater understanding of communities and cultures of other nations and what they mean within a multicultural society here and their expression within a society here in Victoria that celebrates diversity. One of the other functions is also to showcase vibrancy and the contribution of multiculturalism through regular celebrations. So that is celebratory. We hope everyone enjoys a good day or night out, and it is always nice to attend a good festival and eat nice food.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Good morning, Minister. Page 102 of budget paper 3 has a \$300 000 allocation for the multicultural safety ambassadors program, which on page 105 says is a new program to promote the benefits of safe workplace practices and demonstrate the benefits of those workers and employers. Was this a mix-up between your portfolio areas, and should it not have been funded under the WorkCover portfolio?

Mr SCOTT — No. The decision has been made to fund it. When you say funding, without losing ourselves in a discussion of the different portfolios, WorkSafe is not funded through the general government sector so there are grants that exist within WorkSafe. As I indicated, this will be looking at getting high-profile individuals who have an ability to communicate to multicultural communities. I would make a couple of observations. One is it is not the largest expenditure within my portfolio area, but in terms of workplace safety people do die in workplaces. So a decision has been made to provide funding from the general government sector, and therefore it is fitted under, in a sense, this portfolio area because it is specifically targeting multicultural communities. People come to Victoria from societies which in some cases have a lesser tradition of workplace safety, a lesser focus. I would hope all members of this committee would have a strong view that workplace accidents should be reduced and that we should ensure that a fewer number of people are injured in the workplace. Persons come from societies, whether they be business owners or employees, where cultural traditions do not place as great an emphasis on workplace safety as a community like Victoria.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Could you give us which communities in particular you might be referring to?

Mr SCOTT — Well, newer communities particularly, communities that have been here, so newly arrived communities. Most societies outside of the First World, for want of better description, have a lesser emphasis on workplace safety would be the sad truth. In fact a number of societies have very high levels. This might be something, Mr O'Brien, that you are interested in. There is also a disproportionate engagement of migrant communities in workplaces that have a higher rate of injury. That is not purely because of the issues in relation to people's origin but also the overrepresentation of members of migrant communities in areas such as the agricultural workforce, where unfortunately — and I was touching upon this in a previous hearing — there is a much higher rate of injury. So this is a modest investment. It is not a huge investment.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Can I ask then with respect to the ambassadors, are they full-time, are they part-time, are they casual, and who are they going to be?

Mr SCOTT — As I indicated in my presentation, persons with the profile and ability to communicate. Three-hundred thousand dollars does not buy a huge number of employees to work, so we would certainly want to be leveraging volunteers and individuals in the community to spread the message because it is a relatively modest investment.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Will people be paid or not, though?

Mr SCOTT — There are some decisions that we made. There will certainly be some paid support in terms of the program itself, but there would certainly be an intention to maximise the volunteer component of the program. It is a relatively modest investment. I also want to say the investments will be undertaken in such a way to ensure the effectiveness of the program.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — That goes to my next question, which is: what qualifications will ambassadors likely have —

Mr SCOTT — I think it will be vary a bit between communities.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — and whether they will have any KPIs?

Mr SCOTT — Yes. As with the expenditure of any public funds, we want to ensure that there are appropriate protections in place to ensure the effectiveness of the program. I do not want to switch portfolio into being the Minister for Finance, but it is very important actually. While this is a modest investment in an area which has been identified as being of concern, it would vary, I would have to say, in terms of the engagement with communities because in some of the newer communities it would be unreasonable to expect the same level of expertise as in some other communities. This is an issue which arises in a number of areas in multiculturalism, particularly in relation to areas like translating and interpreting. You will have some newer communities at first, which you build up over a period of time, where there is a lesser level of experience in the community, but that does not mean you want to make the perfect the enemy of the good, to use a phrase which one of my colleagues is particularly fond of.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Could we perhaps get the KPIs and any qualifications and —

Mr SCOTT — There have not been announcements made on that yet. There are some processes within government, so I am not sure that I would be able to provide those within the time frames, but I am happy to provide what would be appropriate within it. There is still work being undertaken on developing it, but it certainly is the intention that this has efficacy attached to the program and it is about ensuring the safety of Victorians of migrant backgrounds who work, in many cases, in high-risk environments. As I said, there is an over-representation of newer migrants in some high-risk industries and there is also an issue where persons have come, including employers — I would note, there is an awareness issue around employers —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, I am sorry. I am conscious of time. Can I —

Mr SCOTT — I know. I could go on but I will —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I know you could. Could I go on. You referred to the African Communities Action Plan, \$8.6 million for 18–19, which is a lot of money. Can you explain what it will be actually applied to, what it will actually achieve and how this plan was costed?

Mr SCOTT — I can provide a number — there are some processes that are probably worth going to, because this has been the work — and I am happy to furnish members of the committee with a report that was produced by the African ministerial working group. This has been the culmination of a significant period of work over a long period of time by volunteers within the African communities, because we are talking about a continent here —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I actually have a copy of it, Minister. When I look at it there are a lot of things like 'Support men to change perspectives', blah, blah, blah; 'Create spaces where young people who are struggling feel comfortable'. I am just trying to get a sense of what the \$8.6 million will actually be spent on.

Mr SCOTT — I am happy to respond on the focuses that are identified in the action and to provide context, because I am happy to do so. These were the priorities identified by the group itself, so members of the community, and then put those priorities to government: business employment, education and training, health and wellbeing, empowerment and inclusion, community engagement, cohesion and leadership. I have to say an areas such as employment have been a particular focus. I know the Chair is actually the chair of the implementation committee, so there is some engagement in one sense with wearing a hat from the community. With the \$8.6 million there is a two-step process, in effect. There is an implementation committee which has been established with members from African communities, and there is an expression of interest process underway currently in relation to membership of the committee. And there is I have to say a very strong interest

in that committee from members of Victoria's African communities. The first that have been identified as early allocations have been around targeting employment programs, homework clubs, community liaison officers and responses to drug and alcohol issues.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So who will run those, departments or will you be contracting out?

Mr SCOTT — There are existing programs that exist, so I could take one example. So it will relate to department activities, but there is also work that will be undertaken with community groups themselves and community-led activities, so there will be a mix of responses. There is work to be undertaken. That will be undertaken in cooperation — this is been a very collaborative process — with the implementation committee. So the form of those investments is something that will be developed with the implementation committee itself. There is certainly going to be departmental engagement in relation to an engagement with existing government programs in addition to other funding. I will give an example of existing programs that relate to this work.

There is, one, work being undertaken in the Jobs Victoria Employment Network, which sits in part outside my portfolio, but there is an investment from within the multicultural affairs portfolio in relation to disadvantaged migrant communities. There are some communities, including some African communities, who have disproportionately high levels of unemployment. It is about seeking out specific investments and targeted programs that will help reduce unemployment within those. So if you talk about an aggregate KPI —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I guess what I am asking about is —

Mr SCOTT — we actually want to see outcomes which include people actually receiving employment and receiving jobs.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I guess I am interested to see what this will do specifically for African communities that the broader population cannot already access — I guess is what the question was getting to.

Mr SCOTT — Well, I mean, there are programs that the Jobs Victoria Employment Network does that relate to the broader community, but this is specific investment in the \$8.6 million to the issues that have been identified by the African communities themselves.

Ms PENNICUIK — Minister, I have got quite a broad question and you may —

Mr SCOTT — I will try my best to deal with broad questions.

Ms PENNICUIK — No, given the time, you might need to provide more information on it. For example, budget paper 3, page 309, lists \$84.6 million for multicultural affairs policy and programs. In the multicultural policy statement —

Mr SCOTT — Sorry, can I just have the page reference again?

Ms PENNICUIK — Page 309, that is the whole budget.

Mr SCOTT — Page 309. Yes, that is the whole department and the performance reporting.

Ms PENNICUIK — That is right. The multicultural policy statement announced an outcomes framework 'To drive concrete improvements across government' — that is in the statement — on top of the 30 indicators that governments have been reporting on since 2012. I am just wondering how that outcomes framework is reflected in the budget in terms of the programs that you have listed here. Are they tied to that outcomes framework or are they separate from it?

Mr SCOTT — There are two separate — I might get supplementation on this, but there are two elements to that. One is the budget portfolio responses have been developed in the context of that work and those priorities. Then, in terms of the reporting, there is the reporting that takes place within the budget. There is also —

Ms PENNICUIK — Measurement and reporting against that, as opposed to —

Mr SCOTT — But there is a separate reporting that takes place that we just tabled, in fact.

Ms FALKINGHAM — For annually, we obviously report on all of our metrics, and obviously the creation of the outcomes framework now will add another level of reporting back to not only the minister, but also more broadly to the community. It is a big transition within the public service to move to an outcomes framework that we have been working closely with community on developing. So you will see a very different change in what those metrics look like from kind of what you are used to seeing in the budget papers to much more specific outputs and outcomes, which again is a big transition which we have only just commenced that work on now. That will be reported as part of our annual report on multicultural affairs.

Ms PENNICUIK — So will that be in the next annual report that you start working with that, and how does that relate to all these different programs that the minister has gone through earlier, separate programs? How are they related to the outcomes framework?

Mr SCOTT — They were being developed within the context of the outcomes framework, but also it is not just my own. I think we have got to be careful because of the responsibility to respond to issues of multiculturalism and diverse communities. I will just give an example: the investments, say, in education in English as second language for students — there was an investment in this and there was an investment in the previous budget during this term — relate to the outcomes framework as well. So it is not about just my own specific portfolio responsibilities, there are responses outside of my direct responsibilities which relate to that framework as well.

Ms PENNICUIK — So is that going to be clear to the reader? The minister is now saying different portfolios and then there are all these other programs — is it going to be very clear to the reader how those things are —

Ms FALKINGHAM — That is our consolidation program that happens this time every year in terms of our report back to the community, so you will see a very different way of reporting. But as the minister says, we obviously drive the multi-specific elements of that report. All other government departments have to report in on how they are tracking on their own outcomes, be they from a school attendance or be they from a school outcomes perspective as well.

Ms PENNICUIK — If there is any more information you could provide the committee about how this new way of working —

Mr SCOTT — I would say this is a significant change.

Ms PENNICUIK — It is.

Mr SCOTT — So we are principally talking about not the current report that we are dealing but the future —

Ms PENNICUIK — And just before the Chair —

The CHAIR — Order! Mr Dimopoulos until 11.56 a.m. Perhaps take it on notice.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Minister, just onto combating violent extremism, there is an investment in the budget on page 102, BP3, that is an investment to implement the recommendations of the independent expert panel on preventing violent extremism and terrorism. I just want to get a sense of how that money will be used to safeguard the Victorian community.

Mr SCOTT — I am more than happy to respond. What I would say is that for some of the information — and I make this offer quite genuinely because there have been briefings provided to not just government members but opposition and crossbench members of the Parliament in relation to these matters — there are some matters which I would want to discuss in a forum like this, but there are others, because of the nature of the work that is undertaken, which would be better done in a private briefing. If the committee itself wanted a private briefing, that is certainly available as well. But the offer has certainly been extended and has been utilised in some cases. Others, which is their right, have sought other mechanisms of information. But I am more than willing to have that sort of briefing made available, and I think it is appropriate.

The recommendations of the expert panel have been accepted by government in principle — all of the recommendations. There were 42 recommendations made to strengthen Victoria's ability to prevent, investigate

and monitor responses to terrorism. The Victorian budget provides \$20.9 million of output funding over five years, and that extends beyond my direct responsibilities in some cases. If we go to budget paper 3, there is 'Combating violent extremism', with just over \$14.1 million over two years. There are other fundings in other portfolio areas.

The work that is undertaken in my particular areas of responsibility relates to the social cohesion element of the multicultural affairs portfolio principally. My role is not in terms of the security or policing side of work to prevent violent extremism or terrorism. It is much more to seek to prevent particularly young people, but not exclusively, being vulnerable to the appeal of those who would seek to promote violence within the community and to the Victorian community, because it can be external and internal — those sorts of narratives.

The work is undertaken and coordinated in government by the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce, which is chaired by the Deputy Premier, and I am a member of that task force. The task force takes an evidence-based approach to co-design with community and stakeholders. We have previously discussed — and again I am happy to offer briefings to members on this — support for community pilots, and the extension of those pilots was funded in the 17–18 financial years. There is also a research component to ensure that the Victorian public sector and the broader effort is informed by the best available international and local evidence. This is very much an evidence-driven area of public policy.

Ms SHING — I might stop you there, sorry, Minister. With the very limited time that we have available to us, I just wanted to touch very quickly on community infrastructure and the importance of having community buy-in from multicultural groups and communities around the sorts of investments that they want to see in facilities that they use. By reference to the 15.3 million for the community infrastructure and cultural precincts grant program and other funding, how is it anticipated that funding can assist people to become more involved in their physical communities?

Mr SCOTT — In part I was indicating earlier that having better community infrastructure — and this can be very utilitarian in the application, like better kitchens, better facilities that allow for the safe preparation of food, for example — can be of vital importance to a community and can ensure, particularly for older persons in the Victorian community, that they are able to attend and participate in social activities that allow them to be less socially isolated and to engage not just with their own community but with the broader community, with the commensurate benefits. This is particularly important for older communities here in Victoria. So simple improvements — disability access, for example. Some of those simple improvements —

The CHAIR — Order! Maybe take that on notice.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, page 309 of budget paper 3 has the outputs for multicultural affairs. It shows that your portfolio area spent 12 per cent less — \$6.1 million less — than budgeted yet has a 40 per cent increase in funding this year to \$84.6 million. For example, one of the performance measures is 'Victorian population engaged by multicultural and social cohesion initiatives'. That is consistent at 67 per cent over the past two years and indeed for the target. With a 40 per cent increase in funding, why is there no increase in the targets?

Mr SCOTT — This goes to the nature of funding and what the purposes of the funding are. In the previous year there was the *Victorian. And Proud of It* advertising campaign, which reached many Victorians. While the television advertising component of that has ceased, there is still digital advertising being undertaken, and there will be in the upcoming financial year. So in one sense, while there has been a change of emphasis from having a television advertising campaign, which I think was a very successful advertising campaign in terms of promoting multiculturalism in Victoria and the sorts of values that underpin Victorian multiculturalism, we are expanding some other activities that would reach people as well, like festivals and events. So there has been a bit of a change in the mix. But a large part of the funding is for things like community infrastructure, as has been indicated. If I go to the commitments that have taken place in the budget — the community infrastructure funding and combating violent extremism, so those two elements of the budget — while they are very important, and in fact we were just touching upon the importance of them, they are not per se going to largely, vastly increase the number of persons engaged. They provide a different function.

It is the same with translation services. We have not funded this year as large a television community advertising budget, but through the other activities we are undertaking we are able to reach, we believe, a similar number of people. There has been a change in the structure, to go to the answer to the question, and a

large proportion of the funding relates to activities which are very important. I am sure members of this committee would agree that protecting the community by preventing young people from being attracted to extremism is important, but it is not going to engage a large number of people.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Following that up, Minister, the 6.1 million that was underspent this year has been rolled over. What has actually been underspent?

Mr SCOTT — I can provide a general answer and I might seek to take it on notice —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr SCOTT — But the general answer is this: underspends within this area of expenditure can relate to expenditure of grant programs where part of the grant is expended within a financial year and there can be a lag. That has been a longstanding issue and in fact I have received questions on this matter at previous PAEC hearings, so that is a longstanding issue within multicultural affairs, including predating the election of this government.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Can we get an itemised list?

Mr SCOTT — We can get some information to you as is appropriate on notice. From memory I can provide some information at this point as well. The underspend as a proportion of the budget is, I think, 7.7 per cent of the overall budget this year. For example, in 2012–13 the carryover was larger in nominal terms, despite the budget being much smaller, of 6.28, and was 24.4 per cent, so the carryover in fact as a proportion of the budget is less than it was under the previous government —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, just conscious of time, could I get the rest of that on notice as you confirmed. The Victorian Multicultural Commission's annual report 16–17 confirmed that the VMC no longer has its own strategic plan, no dedicated staff or budget. What is your plan for the VMC, and are you planning to sack the chair and commissioners between now and the election?

Mr SCOTT — No is the answer to that question. In terms of sacking I do not have a plan. Commissioners have resigned on occasion or taken up positions that have made their continued role — I mean, there was a commissioner who ran for Parliament and resigned from the commission. I think that is an appropriate response to that circumstance. It is very difficult as a candidate for public office to be a commissioner seeking election, and I would note that I have appointed members of the Liberal Party —

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Patten until 12.05 p.m.

Ms PATTEN — I just wanted to follow on a little bit from Mr O'Brien's questions around the support around added investment into crime prevention in the multicultural area. In particular I note — it is on budget paper 3, page 9, but also in your press release— you have committed 1.7 million to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at risk of offending. I wonder if you could give a little bit more information about what form this support will take and where it will be operated, and how we will engage with these young people to prevent that.

Mr SCOTT — I think it is a really good question. As I said in terms of crime prevention, as with preventing violent extremism, the work that is undertaken in the multicultural portfolio area is not police work per se. It is much more the preventative work and seeking to ensure that young people have opportunities within the society. So this is work that will look at establishing community support groups. The initial work is looking at Wyndham, Melton, Brimbank and the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, which will provide a hub of delivery of a range of services to support young people and their families, including access to jobs, counselling, mentoring and support for engagement or re-engagement.

Ms PATTEN — So is that going through specific —

Mr SCOTT — There are community support groups which are in the process of being established in those areas. In a sense it is really about the coordination of services and ensuring that young people have access points. This is something I am actually very passionate about.

Ms PATTEN — I know; I was hoping we would hear about it in the north too, Minister.

Mr SCOTT — These are partnerships with DHHS, because there is a service delivery element which is often delivered outside of my direct portfolio responsibilities, and that includes youth and family outreach workers, youth mentoring, parenting program, family support packages, drug and alcohol counselling, sport and recreation programs, so it is really about —

Ms PATTEN — So it is about having actually having a central one door?

Mr SCOTT — One place where people are coordinating and really having a focus on that individual's need and ensuring that government services address the needs of the person's life. It is something I am really passionate about and I am glad you asked about that.

Ms PATTEN — Great. Thank you, Minister; I am too. Just following on in regard to security and crime prevention, you were talking about the large increase in multicultural community infrastructure programs and part of that was for security upgrades. I wonder if you could elaborate on what sorts of security upgrades you are talking about.

Mr SCOTT — I am going to be careful because obviously when you are upgrading security you do not want to tell the people who might be on the other side of that upgrading equation what exactly you are doing, but really this is ensuring that important community facilities have appropriate security. Now, you cannot eliminate risks, so we have to be careful in how to describe this, but it is about appropriate security upgrades to minimise and appropriately manage risks that exist at those facilities.

Sadly — and I have to say very sadly, and I would like to particularly single out the work that the Jewish community has done in this space — there are risks to community facilities that exist from those who would seek to express violent extremism in society, and this is a really unfortunate fact of life in 2018. That attenuates not just to state buildings or the operations of the state but also to community facilities. We are very cognisant that all members of the Victorian community should have an appropriate level of safety and security. In terms of the detail I will probably want to give a private briefing on some of the detail because of the nature of those.

Ms PATTEN — Thanks, Minister.

The CHAIR — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott, MP; Mr Burns; Ms Falkingham; Mr Akyol; and Ms Parle. You can follow up on any questions and comments in writing. A written request will be provided within 10 days of that request.

Witnesses withdrew.