

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Friday, 20 May 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Mr Martin Foley MP, Minister for Equality,

Ms Brigid Monagle, Associate Secretary,

Ms Rachel Cecilio, Director, Fairer Victoria, Engagement and Coordination, and

Ms Nicola Young, Senior Executive Director, Fairer Victoria, Engagement and Coordination, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging, as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

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

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

We welcome Minister Foley again, this time for the equality portfolio. We invite you to make an opening statement, and this will be followed by questions.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Chair. Like you, I also acknowledge the First Peoples and the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

In regard to the equality portfolio, Victoria is in every way leading the path for LGBTIQ+ equality, celebrating culture, community and taking durable and measurable actions to build equality outcomes for LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

Visual presentation.

Mr FOLEY: Since the establishment of the portfolio in 2015 we have been proud to stand with LGBTIQ+ Victorians. We have both listened to and celebrated with community voices, and more importantly, we have partnered with LGBTIQ+ people, communities and organisations to spearhead important and often life-changing and life-saving reforms. We are working to create an LGBTIQ+ future for Victorians where they can participate fully in the economic, educational and political community and social life of all parts of our state.

In regard to the next one—thank you—we have delivered on this commitment, particularly in recent times, by launching *Pride in our Future*, the first long-term LGBTIQ+ whole-of-government strategy, which provides our road map for all parts of government to build equality over the next 10 years. In the past 12 months we have also opened the Victorian Pride Centre—Australia's first purpose-built LGBTIQ+ community and indeed wider digital and outreach hub. We have also delivered on our election commitment of the first Melbourne Pride party, which marked 40 years since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Victoria by the then Hamer government. We have supported emerging LGBTIQ+ leaders, particularly young leaders with a range of diverse identities and backgrounds, to graduate from the most recent LGBTIQ+ leadership program to build the future leaders of this community. Next slide.

This budget with its significant investment of \$14.7 million demonstrates our continued commitment to achieving equality through the rollout of the first whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ strategy for the continued delivery of a number of flagship and specialised services. This \$6.5 million delivery, already started to be

invested in 2021–22, includes statewide training resources to the tune of \$2 million, \$1.3 million to support the health and wellbeing of people with intersex variations, \$2 million to continue the government's trans and gender-diverse peer-support program and \$1.2 million to support the rollout of awareness campaigns to tackle discrimination. But the work does not stop there. It is also about making sure that we ensure the implementation of this strategy across the four key areas that we outlined earlier in the presentation. There is \$6.8 million to deliver statewide annual supports over the next four years to diverse communities, building on the success of Melbourne Pride this year. There is \$3.2 million to trial safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ young people in the western regions of Victoria, particularly for bringing together targeted mental health and wellbeing support. There is also \$600 000 to celebrate and continue to support community-led events across the state, especially in regional and rural settings.

We will also continue the flagship equality programs and specialised LGBTIQ+ services by investing, for instance, another \$1.5 million under the health portfolio around the trans and gender-diverse communities in the community health program of the Department of Health, and there is a \$1 million investment to build capacity and skills of LGBTIQ+ leaders and organisations to grow and sustain their advocacy and leadership, which is so important. There is also support under the Attorney-General's portfolio of \$1.6 million to develop a specialised LGBTIQ+ legal service, also to be based at the Victorian Pride Centre.

All of this recognises the important whole-of-government leadership that the very small equality units of the department deliver. I want to thank them for their tireless efforts and all in the LGBTIQ+ community who have backed us in this important work. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Minister, can I take you to that \$3.2 million and the trial of several safe spaces in western Victoria. When you were on Joy FM earlier this month, you referred to 'a safe space' in the singular and that it would be located in Geelong. Exactly what will that \$3.2 million fund? How many safe spaces, and what will it fund?

Mr FOLEY: It might have been a miscommunication on my part—I have to take responsibility for that. It is in regard to a range of spaces. I had discussions in the run-up to the budget with community members, both in the Ballarat community and the wider Barwon region, and we are hopeful that this money will lever off, at least in its own right but we hope in partnership with other organisations, particularly health services, local government and other community organisations, based on the important work of SQUAD—I cannot remember what SQUAD stands for—and community-driven organisations, particularly youth-driven community organisations, in that part of the state. So, yes, I am hopeful that there will be a facility in Geelong, and it is also my hope and it is my expectation that this funding will deliver a range of services across that Barwon–Grampians part of western Victoria—and it will be more than one. As we go through an expression-of-interest and partnering process with health services and, we hope, local government—we have had significant interest from local government—and community-based organisations, we hope to lever that money as far and wide as we possibly can, in keeping with the proposition that it is built on from community-based organisations, who have so championed that particular set of safe spaces.

Mr NEWBURY: And in talking about services, would you be looking for mental health services to partner—

Mr FOLEY: Of course. That will be part of the equation. Take for instance the conversations I have had directly with Barwon Health as but one example. Barwon Health deliver a range of mental health and other support services. Indeed they have specialist staff that look to how they can work with the LGBTIQ+ community, with members, as indeed do other community-based organisations in that part of Victoria. That picks up both recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System that identifies LGBTIQ+ Victorians as being disproportionately over-represented in poorer outcomes when it comes to mental health. So it would certainly be my expectation, and indeed the expectation of the community groups that put this proposal forward to government, that mental health services—as part of a wraparound service—will be part of that important work.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. And can I refer you to the \$7.4 million for events, both that \$6.8 million and the \$600 000—was the government's LGBTIQ+ task force consulted on that money?

Mr FOLEY: In terms of the current budget or—

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, the current budget. So in terms of when that allocation was being proposed, was the task force consulted?

Mr FOLEY: The task force, which I co-chair, is consulted on all of the processes that we put in place. Indeed more than consulted—the work that the task force did to drive the whole-of-government strategy provided the foundation point for this particular budget outcome. What the whole-of-government 10-year strategy has as one of its critical foundation points, which was in one of the earlier presentations, is visibility. The community right across the state, but particularly in our regions, is very, very strong in its view that to be accepted and to be—particularly for young people—prepared to come forward and express who you are, you have to be visible in safe ways. I was particularly pleased to launch, on IDAHOBIT Day just a few days ago, the rainbow-ready road map that particularly targets regional and rural communities—civic society, local government, sporting groups, education groups and others—to build the partnerships to deliver precisely those things. So in the sense that the whole-of-government task group shapes the strategy that goes into the budget processes and some of the specific recommendations, then yes, not just that area but the wider programs are reflected in this budget.

Mr NEWBURY: The reason I raised it is there are parts of the community who have spoken to me about that money and said, in the nicest possible way, ‘Are we better pink washing or are we better targeting that money into things like mental health support?’. What would you say to that?

Mr FOLEY: I do not accept the notion that this is—what did you call it—pink washing? What I accept is that the community right across the state accept the proposition that to be seen is a critical part of being heard, and to be seen is a critical part that enables the community to step forward and have their voice, particularly in their local community, heard. For instance, I have been in conversations with Mallee Pride in recent times, and whilst communities change, there still continue to be quite substantial pressures when you get further away from where we are sitting, to be not too blunt about it, to make it more challenging for those communities to be seen and therefore to be able to have their voice heard. In that context, what we found in the original regional and rural road map consultations that happened both prepandemic and during the pandemic and the formation of the whole-of-government 10-year strategy was that visible events, community driven, were a consistent, strong theme. That is one part of the effort. Another part of the effort is very much that wider incorporation of services, such as mental health, across all different parts of government services. So in short, I think it is an ability to do both.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: I refer you to budget paper 3, page 48. Could you please explain how the initiatives funded in the budget align with the objectives of the LGBTIQ+ strategy?

Mr FOLEY: Very much, and that very much builds on some of the questioning that Mr Newbury pointed to. So *Pride in our Future*, which we released earlier this year, is very much about recognising that, despite the advances that have been made, much more needs to be done to address the discrimination and continuing inequalities amongst our LGBTIQ+ Victorians that lead to poorer health, wellbeing, social, economic and other outcomes in the lives of LGBTIQ+ Victorians. This document, *Pride in our Future*, is very much a blueprint of what we think is achievable across all of government and the broader community so as to ensure that Victorians—whoever they are and wherever they are—can feel safe and healthy, have their human rights respected and be able to live as who they are freely.

There are four priority areas, which I touched on in the presentation, about reforms, and they are: the protecting of equal rights and freedoms, so essentially a rights-based and legal-based approach; making services more equitable, inclusive and accessible; delivery right across government, making sure that, as part of the delivery of services—government and non-government, contracted and directly delivered—the interests of LGBTIQ+ Victorians of different ages and in different communities are taken into consideration; and building evidence and capacity to make sure that LGBTIQ+ Victorians are engaged in those decisions that affect them. So right across the board those four areas reflect how these services are able to be delivered, and whether it is the \$1.6 million for the specialist legal service or whether it is the \$2.5 million to create equitable, inclusive and accessible services—essentially accreditation support measures—we will continue to make sure that those roll out.

Equally the grants program that was referred to earlier, about developing capacity and leadership, is also particularly important—and no more so than in the current hurtful debate that goes to the role of trans women, particularly young trans women, in community health and community sports programs. In that regard, the building safe, strong and sustainable communities priority area will see some \$10.6 million invested in a range of events and supports right across the state, from grassroots efforts to much wider safer spaces, as Mr Newbury touched on, and the ability to bring together and connect services with LGBTIQ+ communities in an appropriate, safe space on their terms and increasingly closer to the home.

Bring all that together; it is how we can start this decade-long strategy towards embedding the principles of what LGBTIQ+ equality looks like in people's lives in a real sense into the next decade.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. Perhaps you could unpack for the committee how LGBTIQ+ communities were involved in the development of this strategy and the four key priority areas you spoke about.

Mr FOLEY: Indeed. This goes also tangentially to one of the issues that Mr Newbury raised, and that is how community has driven the *Pride in our Future* strategy. Whilst it reflects the voices of Victoria's rainbow communities at its heart, it did that through an exhaustive process of community engagement. There were over 1600 public and community contributions across the consultation period across 2020 and 2021. Despite the challenges that many communities had in physically coming together in that time, there was nonetheless a broad range of organisations, both mainstream and LGBTIQ+ community-specific organisations, who made up the hundreds of submissions that were received to the issues paper and the engagement strategies that flowed from that. There were also a number of targeted workshops, online surveys, material provided on the DPC Engage website and of course multiple accepted written submissions. There were consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders, particularly including key LGBTIQ+ leadership organisations, interested mainstream services, peak bodies, industry groups, government departments, emergency services—the works. The amount of engagement was phenomenal and more than what we had expected. So I want to thank all those organisations and both the current and former LGBTIQ+ community commissioners for their important engagement.

The formal structures that government has set up to engage across the rich diversity of the LGBTIQ+ communities—there is the whole-of-government task force, the justice working group, the health and wellbeing working group and from time to time particular groups in particular parts of government for particular issues. I want to thank all of those people, and there were, as I say, over 1600 public and community contributions to it. The real question is now, having developed the strategy and having a \$14 million down payment on its implementation, how we can spend the next 10 years building on that, implementing it and making, in a sense, the LGBTIQ+ strategy part and parcel of the everyday lives of the Victorian community, government and private sector organisations.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, it is great to see such intense engagement in building the strategy. I understand the funding builds on \$6.5 million already invested by the government. Can you please elaborate on the progress of the work already undertaken?

Mr FOLEY: Indeed. I would refer the committee to the work in the *Pride in our Future* strategy, which, whilst fundamentally a forward-looking document, also reflects on the recent and long-term path of building the equality project to the point where we are at today. We think we have made significant progress when it comes to LGBTIQ+ community equality, and we are quite proud of how we have achieved that. Really the \$6.5 million that you referred to over four years, allocated through the most recent budget, points to building on some of those achievements. For instance, the statewide training to make organisations safer and more inclusive for LGBTIQ+ Victorians is critical, as is the \$1.3 million to support the health and wellbeing of people, as I touched on, with a focus on our intersex community, who have done it particularly tough, I have to say. If there was an area that I was particularly hopeful for progress on in the coming times, it would be our intersex variant community and the rich diversity of community members that sit behind that part of the rainbow. There is also \$1.2 million to develop public awareness campaigns to combat LGBTIQ+ discrimination, which sadly stills continues in far too much of the Victorian community, and \$2 million to build on the peer support, especially for trans and gender-diverse young Victorians.

If we add all this together, particularly in this, the week of the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia, I was very pleased to be able to launch the Rainbow Ready road map, which takes that whole-of-government strategy, takes that work that has been delivered to date and builds on it

in a really practical way that can be community led by allies of the LGBTIQ+ community. Can I give a particular shout-out to the West Wimmera council, who this week flew the rainbow flag, as one of many local government areas, for the first time and acknowledge their change of heart about how important that decision is to reflect the rich diversity of that relatively speaking remote part of Victoria and acknowledge the journey that that council has been on and in a way encourage that council and others to continue down that path of recognition and that through recognition change is needed.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and your team, for appearing this afternoon. Minister, I know there is a bit of crossover between this portfolio and the Attorney-General's, but can I ask: can you inform the committee when the government is planning to put into operation division 2, part 2 of the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Act*? That is the part that refers to publicly funded faith-based organisations.

Mr FOLEY: You are right; there is a crossover between this portfolio and the Attorney-General's portfolio. I do not speak for the Attorney-General, but Nicola will just help me out here.

Mr HIBBINS: The issue is that it is either to be proclaimed or 12 months after the royal assent of the Bill.

Mr FOLEY: Rather than speculate on what the Attorney-General will do, I know from discussions that it is well in hand. I might, with the Chair's indulgence, given that it is not my portfolio responsibility, perhaps discuss this matter with the department of justice and get them to respond, if that is appropriate, to provide Mr Hibbins an answer to the question.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. I guess the point is that obviously before the election would be preferable. Obviously there is a potential for it not being proclaimed after the election.

Mr FOLEY: Indeed.

Mr HIBBINS: There could be a risk there. Can I ask about rainbow tick jobs, which have been very successful in operations so far. Is there any funding within the budget to expand the rainbow tick to mental health or housing services?

Mr FOLEY: The equality team in the equality portfolio is consciously small—it is remarkably small; there are seven people in it—and it is also consciously there to engage with the rest of government to drive precisely this *Pride in our Future* strategy. In regard to accreditation programs in housing and mental health, having been a former minister for both portfolios and not wishing to speak for those portfolios now, I can nonetheless assure you that there is important work being done and continuing to be done around that. And, as Nicola has pointed out to me, some of that \$2 million for the statewide training resources, which are commencing in this financial year, will include our mainstream services such as those that you have touched on, which can deliver not just a rainbow tick, but more importantly, the real inclusion that flows from it. That is in this portfolio, but I also know that in those and indeed other portfolios there are internal resources across government being specifically allocated to this and other measures of diversity inclusion to be part of their strategies to build more inclusive services right across the Victorian government sector.

Mr HIBBINS: Within that, you mentioned mainstream services—obviously very important—but what about community-controlled services? Is there any direction in that regard?

Mr FOLEY: Indeed. They are also covered by that. And in terms of the diversity of the community organisations that sit within the rainbow coalition, if you like, accreditation and professionalisation and delivery of services for community-led organisations is arguably even more important because the record shows time after time that LGBTIQ+ community members feel more confident coming forward to LGBTIQ+-specific services in whatever form they are—take your pick. But how we build the capacity of those community-led services whilst at the same time leveraging off the momentum for equality and inclusion in wider mainstream services—they are two sides of the one coin.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the estimates here today, Minister. We thank you for appearing before the committee in all your different capacities.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

I thank all the ministers—well, there is only yourself today, Minister—for giving evidence to the committee today as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants. I also thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff that have looked after all of us today.

The committee will resume consideration of the 2022–23 budget estimates on Monday. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.