

MONDAY, 22 JULY 2024

ESTIMATES—COST OF LIVING AND ECONOMICS COMMITTEE— QUEENSLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Estimate Committee Members

Mr LP Power—Chair
Mr RA Stevens
Ms AJ Camm
Mr MJ Crandon
Mrs MF McMahon
Ms JC Pugh

Members in Attendance

Mr AC Powell
Mr MC Berkman
Mr SSJ Andrew

In Attendance

Hon. CW Pitt, Speaker
Ms C Kemp, Executive Officer, Office of the Speaker
Mr N Laurie, Clerk of the Parliament
Mr M Ries, Deputy Clerk and Director, Assembly and Committee Services
Mr C Atkinson, Director, Corporate Services and Electorate Office Liaison
Ms M Harmer, Director, Property and Facility Services
Mr J Rasmussen, Head of IT Services

The committee met at 2.00 pm.



CHAIR: Good afternoon. I declare this estimates hearing of the Cost of Living and Economics Committee open. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders, past and present. We are extraordinarily fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

I am Linus Power, the member for Logan and chair of the committee. With me here today is Mr Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach and deputy chair. The other members of the committee are: Mr Michael Crandon, the member for Coomera; Ms Amanda Camm, the member for Whitsunday; Mrs Melissa McMahon, the member for Macalister; and Ms Jess Pugh, the member for Mount Ommaney. The committee is also joined by members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today, including Mr Andrew Powell and Mr Michael Berkman.

I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the chair's discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting our witnesses here today are permitted to use

personal electronic devices in the chamber. I ask all present to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. I also remind everyone that food and drink are not permitted in this chamber.

This year the House has determined the program for the committee's estimates hearing. Today the committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2024 for the portfolio of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland until 3 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to the portfolio area can only be raised during the time specified for the area as agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House, available throughout this chamber and on the committee's webpage. I remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing orders and rules of the Legislative Assembly.

On behalf of the committee I welcome the Speaker, Mr Clerk, the parliamentary officers and of course the many members of the public who have joined us. For the benefit of Hansard I ask officials when speaking for the first time to identify themselves as they answer a question referred to them by the Speaker or the Clerk. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area administered by the Speaker open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Mr Speaker, if you wish, you may make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you to the members of the Cost of Living and Economics committee for having us here today and to the guest members, the members for Glass House and Maiwar. I am pleased to be here today at the 2024-25 budget estimates hearing for the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Service in my capacity as Speaker. I would also like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on the land of Aboriginal people and pay my respects to elders past and present, and I do thank them as first Australians for their careful custodianship of the land over countless generations.

I also wish to welcome to the front table Mr Neil Laurie, the Clerk of the Parliament, Coral-Leah Kemp from the Office of the Speaker and the other officers of the Parliamentary Service who will be assisting in answering your questions today regarding the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2024. As a member of parliament, I have had the pleasure of witnessing firsthand the hard work and creativity of the Parliamentary Service and I am grateful for their contributions. The service has cultivated a mindset that welcomes fresh perspectives, resulting in a culture of continuous improvement.

The 2023-24 period saw another busy 12 months for the Parliamentary Service. In May we were able to welcome members back to their offices and bedrooms in the Parliamentary Annexe following much needed safety improvement and refurbishment works. I am sure all members, including the members appearing today as part of the committee, would agree that the disruption was well worth the wait when looking at the modern yet modest improvements. The service also delivered six modules of the Parliamentary Information Management System, known as PIMS, replacing many bespoke and outdated applications and improving manual processes with more efficient digital solutions.

The parliamentary education team had another busy year hosting activities in Brisbane and in regional centres across Queensland and online, and I hope to have the opportunity to talk more about some of these programs throughout the hearing today. We are very proud of the ongoing work of our parliamentary catering team, who actively work with and showcase Queensland producers and suppliers. I will now turn briefly to the 2024-25 estimates for the parliament.

The Appropriation (Parliament) Bill provides the funding for the members of the Legislative Assembly in addition to funding for the Parliamentary Service, which supports the Legislative Assembly's business functions through administrative and operational activities. The total appropriation sought for the parliament in 2024-25 is \$131.935 million, a decrease of around \$10.2 million over the approved appropriation provided in the 2023-24 budget. This decrease reflects the completion of the major capital works project to repair the external facade of the building and refurbish ageing office and accommodation rooms of members' floors. The 2024-25 budget includes funding of \$12.597 million to provide an additional assistant electorate officer position across each of the 93 electorates throughout Queensland to support the increasing workloads in the electorate offices of each member.

Turning to capital works, while the major phase of the annexe refurbishment program has now been completed, attention will now turn to completing repairs and upgrades to the level 7 podium areas and the committee hearing rooms. As part of the Parliamentary Service's ongoing digital transformation strategy, work will continue in 2024-25 to deliver stage 2 of the Parliamentary Information Management System. Works will also continue with ongoing audiovisual upgrades to various rooms within the precinct, building on the upgrades delivered in 2023-24 to the chamber audio system. A key focus for

the Parliamentary Service over the next six months will be coordinating the transition to the 58th Parliament following the October 2024 state election, culminating in the ceremonial opening of the new parliament.

Mr Chair, I would like to take this opportunity whilst I make the opening statement to provide some clarity regarding a public response that was put forward to a question on notice. Question on notice No. 20 included a response regarding the total number of lost working days during construction of the Parliamentary Annexe upgrade project. In my response, I advised that a total of 54 days were awarded for delays. While my response is technically correct, for completeness I would like to also advise that there was an additional nine days where work was halted on site temporarily due to various safety concerns or incidents. These delays, however, did not result in any additional costs or extensions in timeframes for the project. Quite often, I will ask members to correct the record at their earliest opportunity. It would be remiss of me if I did not follow my own advice and ensure I put that on the record at my earliest possible opportunity.

I am honoured to be appearing before this committee today to speak to the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill. I thank the committee for its work in scrutinising the budget. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

CHAIR: Normally at this point I turn to my deputy chair.

Mr STEVENS: I defer to the Manager of Opposition Business for the first question.

Mr POWELL: Just for clarity, the opening brackets of questions will all be directed to the Clerk of the Parliament. Mr Clerk, I refer to question on notice Nos 6 and 20 and the Speaker's opening statement about the completion of the refurbishment of the annexe. First of all, congratulations to both you and Mr Speaker and all of your teams for that. Regarding the CFMEU protest which occurred on the annexe during the refurbishment, can the Clerk confirm that protesters gained access to the building using a workplace health and safety entry permit?

Mr Laurie: I preface what I am about to say on the basis that at the time of the incursion that I believe you are referring to, which occurred in October 2022—so in the early period of the refurbishment—the information I have at hand is information relayed to us by the builder who was actually in control of the site, Hutchinson contractors. I am of the understanding—you are correct—that access was gained to the site by virtue of a workplace health and safety inspection.

Mr POWELL: Can the Clerk advise what action was taken when the parliament became aware that workplace health and safety entry permits had been used for protest purposes?

Mr Laurie: When the protest commenced, we were in immediate contact with Hutchinson Builders and we requested those people to exit the level 7 point. What I was focused on thereafter was ensuring that such did not occur again whenever a protest was in place, so it then became the practice that whenever there was a protest in or around the precinct the Parliamentary Service would regain control of the area and take it off Hutchinson Builders. We essentially then shut down that area so that there would be no other workers on site. There was no formal complaint made, though.

Mr POWELL: No formal complaint, no referral?

Mr Laurie: Not that I can recall.

Mr POWELL: Not from the parliament?

Mr Laurie: No.

Mr POWELL: Okay.

Mr Laurie: We see that those issues are matters between the contractor and the union.

Mr POWELL: Is the Clerk aware of any CFMEU workers or subcontractors who worked on the precinct refurbishment having any association with outlaw motorcycle gangs?

Mr Laurie: No. I am not aware of that firsthand.

Mr POWELL: Were there any incidents during the works where Parliament House staff felt threatened or intimidated by any workers or subcontractors operating on the project?

Mr Laurie: There was an incident very early in the project. It occurred around the same time as regional parliament was occurring in Cairns. We had the intention initially to establish a tradies cafe on level 7 of the Parliamentary Annexe which would service all of the contractors on site during the course of the refurbishment. Whilst we were in Cairns for the regional sitting it came to my attention that there had been some verbal stouthing with some of our staff up on level 7—that is, our catering staff—and so I directed that the cafe be shut and it was never reopened.

Mr POWELL: Was any action taken against any of the individuals who undertook that threatening or intimidating behaviour, other than the cafe being shut?

Mr Laurie: The incident involved what I would call a verbal altercation, if you like. It did not get to any criminal stage so there was no criminal complaint. There were discussions with the contractors about the fact that we were shutting it up because of the activities of the people at the time and I am unaware of what other action has taken place.

Mr POWELL: Were you aware if the individuals involved were members of the CFMEU?

Mr Laurie: I am aware that they were, yes.

Mr POWELL: Just switching to the Speaker's response to question on notice No. 3 which refers to the parliament's digital transformation program and the intent to reduce further exposure to cyber risks, in light of last Friday's CrowdStrike outage and some rather concerning findings in the Queensland Audit Office's report No. 12 of 2023-24 titled *Responding to and recovering from cyber attacks*, I ask the Clerk: does the parliament have a cyber incident response plan?

Mr Laurie: Yes, we do, is the short answer. In a moment I might hand over to James Rasmussen from IT to give us some further details about the cyber response. In respect of what actually occurred on Friday, CrowdStrike was introduced into our environment in 2019. It is more than an antivirus application; it actively scans for malicious code. As we understand it, at 1.50 pm on Friday last week desktops, laptops and parliamentary servers started to show the so-called 'blue screen of death' and went into a continual reboot cycle. This was caused by a faulty code being pushed directly to servers and PCs by CrowdStrike. They update their material on our sites all of the time. The faulty code caused the affected machines to enter an endless loop of reboots, taking them offline and making it harder to fix. All 126 Parliamentary Service servers were impacted, which meant the entire ICT environment was taken offline. The Parliamentary Service activated its IT recovery plan at 5.30, once the cause of the problem was known. IT Services had all of our servers operational again by 8.45 pm. This involved a complete restart of the Parliamentary Service's entire ICT environment and required IT infrastructure staff to undertake remediation work on all 126 servers. Parliamentary IT staff came into the precinct on Saturday to remediate all affected desktop PCs and to test the parliament's broadcast system to ensure everything was fully operational for today's hearing.

Electorate office PCs were also affected and are the focus of today's remediation efforts, which I understand are almost complete. SMS alerts were sent to staff to let them know what was going on. I might hand over to James to talk about—

Mr POWELL: The specific question was: does the parliament have a cyber incident response plan? If it is being passed to Mr Rasmussen, I might also ask: prior to it actually having to be implemented, if it does exist, had it been tested prior to last Friday's date?

Mr Laurie: Yes, it does exist and, yes, it has been tested.

Mr Rasmussen: Yes, we have had a cybersecurity response plan for a number of years now. It does set out the various different procedures that we would undertake should a breach occur and it sets that out based on the nature of the event that would occur. It was actioned on Friday but it was quickly determined that it was not a cybersecurity breach, so we then moved into our IT recovery plan, which is also set out in detail, which we then enacted, which allowed us to respond very quickly and have our services back online.

Mr Laurie: The irony has not escaped us that it was our cybersecurity support that caused the problem.

Mr POWELL: Understood; I do not think it has escaped the entire world, Mr Clerk. The QAO report also found that government agencies could not have any confidence third parties would be available or have the expertise to deal with a real incident in an effective and timely manner. Given that as of now there are still services down across electorates, how have the parliament's third-party providers assisted or otherwise in the restoration of our IT operations?

CHAIR: Is that addressed to Mr Laurie or to Mr Rasmussen?

Mr POWELL: In the first instance the Clerk.

Mr Laurie: We do use third parties, and one third party we have been using for a little while now is a company by the name of Riot, which provides us cybersecurity support. To be perfectly blunt, we use third parties because it is virtually impossible as a small organisation to keep that service in-house. We went through a period where we were trying to do it in-house. We could not get the requisite people

and we could not get the requisite people to stay, so that is why in the main we went to Riot as a third-party supplier. I am not too sure about the precise details of Riot's involvement in Friday's attacks. I will pass back over to Mr Rasmussen for that.

Mr Rasmussen: Riot Solutions are providing a vigilance activity with regard to trying to identify any options where people might try to capitalise on this event, but the actual restoration process is something we will have to deal with in-house because of the access required to be able to restore these services.

CHAIR: Have you finished that block?

Mr POWELL: Just one more on cybersecurity, if I may, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: Certainly.

Mr POWELL: In light of what has occurred and given the sensitive electoral data that members of parliament in particular hold, can you confirm where that sensitive data is kept and the security measures that are in place to protect it?

Mr Laurie: I think I can answer this, but I think it is safer if I pass it over to Mr Rasmussen.

Mr Rasmussen: Each of our systems has a data classification where we understand those systems and the data that they hold and then we put appropriate controls around those. Are you asking specifically where that sits?

Mr POWELL: I guess the first question is: internally, you are responsible for that data security; is that correct?

Mr Rasmussen: Correct. Also, for any data that is stored out of the cloud we do a full cloud assessment to be able to assess the security credentials before we send the data to that site.

Mr POWELL: In this instance, where it was the cybersecurity company's own upload that failed, there was never any issue in terms of the security of that data?

Mr Rasmussen: No, because the incident that we are talking about is not actually related to data; it is related to the protection of the computers themselves, so data is not in question here. It is not a storage of PS confidential data. It does not store it.

Mr POWELL: The most recent incident aside, you are confident that there is sufficient security around that data and where it is kept?

Mr Rasmussen: I am confident in the processes that we have and we are always looking to improve them.

Mr BERKMAN: I will direct my question to the Clerk, if I might. It relates specifically to question on notice 21, Mr Laurie. First of all, thank you sincerely to the Table Office for all the work they did in putting that data together. I am specifically interested in the statistics around how often the business program motion has caused the guillotine of the second reading debate, which is more than 50 per cent in the last three years and more than 50 per cent for five of the last seven years, and, additionally, the statistic that for this sitting year—so only half a sitting year so far—we have had 16 bills debated in cognate and an average of four minutes for consideration in detail of each bill. Mr Laurie, you have been Clerk for a lot longer than the 6½ years for which data has been compiled.

CHAIR: The preamble is a bit long.

Mr BERKMAN: Have you ever seen so little time for consideration in detail or so many bills debated in cognate?

Mr Laurie: I will treat them separately. Bills debated in cognate: I would say that is not an unusual statistic, from my memory. Certainly, what I have noticed is a considerable decline in the use of consideration in detail. When I first started at the table it was called the committee of the whole. This has been a change that has occurred over the years. It has become obviously much more marked since we have had a business program motion.

I think that there is a trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness sometimes. Obviously the business program motion is put in place and its whole reason for being is to have bills go through in an efficient passage of time, but there is a trade-off in time for that. I suspect that on most occasions the quantity of members want to talk on the second reading debate rather than about the detail of clauses. Therefore, the second reading debate is preferred in terms of the allocation of time as compared to consideration in detail. Certainly, since the business program motion came into being, there has been a dramatic drop off in the amount of time spent in consideration in detail.

Mr BERKMAN: If I could ask a brief follow-up question, Mr Clerk: in your experience, what are the consequences of that limited consideration in detail for the quality of debate and legislative scrutiny in the Assembly?

CHAIR: You might be seeking opinion. Mr Clerk?

Mr Laurie: I think the purpose of consideration in detail is as it says: it is an opportunity for the House to consider the bill clause by clause. If I recall back to the time when consideration in detail and/or committee of the whole processes used to work, we used to spend an awful lot of time in that process where members would be asking questions about clauses and their effects and ministers would be providing answers. That process does not occur anymore. I guess that if you do not have a consideration in detail then you are not really considering the clauses in a great amount of detail; rather, you are only looking at the wider policy issues in the second reading debate.

CHAIR: Mr Speaker, members might not know that my father was a teacher of the deaf. I noted with some interest that in answer to a question on notice you referred to the initiative to host the deaf youth parliament later this year. Mr Speaker, can you outline the background to the initiative and how the deaf youth parliament will operate?

Mr SPEAKER: I was not aware of that interesting anecdote about your father. I am very excited about the Deaf Youth Parliament initiative. It is difficult to show any form of innovation when it comes to what I think is well-worn territory in terms of doing youth parliaments. This one, in particular, came about because of a longstanding friendship I have with the CEO of Deaf Connect Queensland, Brett Casey. I was the disabilities minister in the Bligh government and I got to know Brett at that time. I was making that exact point that we do Indigenous youth parliaments, Indigenous junior youth parliaments, legal studies youth parliaments and YMCA youth parliaments. All of those are fantastic and they have been going for a number of years now, or at least a few years.

This is an opportunity for students who are deaf to gather in the Legislative Assembly chamber to conduct a mock parliamentary sitting entirely in Auslan. The deaf youth parliament was conceived in a way to ensure that we could allow deaf students to fully participate in civics and citizenship. It has been developed after consultation with Deaf Services Queensland and the Department of Education's Deaf and Hard of Hearing service. Students will be travelling from across the state. We will have more than 22 students from across 12 schools from as far away as Far North Queensland including places such as Weipa and Mareeba as well as Mackay.

Staff at the Parliamentary Service have been offered and have undertaken deaf awareness training in preparation for the event, which I attended last week. It was a very important thing. I thought I knew most everything about the deaf world and a lot of the culture and important things that make it quite unique. However, I learnt something as well. I think it was a very worthwhile exercise. We have done that to ensure that students, teachers and teacher aides who are involved and who will be sitting in the chamber during the conduct of the parliament as well as our Parliamentary Service members will be able to ensure that this goes off without a hitch.

Those of us not fluent in Auslan will be assisted by interpreters. The young people who are signing will have their speeches interpreted live for our benefit. Additional screens will be set up in the chamber and the public gallery to ensure that all involved have a good view of an interpreter or the youth member who is on their feet delivering a speech. The parliamentary proceeding will be recorded and will be available later on YouTube in what will hopefully be an enduring resource for deaf students learning about the legislative process.

Students will engage in debate over two motions that have been co-designed by teachers as well as the students themselves. They will be debating issues that are topical in the deaf community as well as issues that are affecting everyday Queenslanders. They will also relate to changes to the Jury Act to allow for deaf jurors and the compulsory inclusion of closed captioning at all cinema screenings.

Members of parliament who have students who attend participating schools that are in their electorates will be invited to attend, of course. I definitely encourage all members, if they cannot be in the gallery in person, to make sure that they take the opportunity to look at the broadcast or the recording of that broadcast.

Having done our due diligence by speaking to other parliamentary education groups not only in the federal parliament but also in all of the state and territory parliaments in Australia and New Zealand, this is a first. As I said, it is something that came about in an unusual way but it is one of the things that I am most proud of that we have been able to undertake. Certainly it will not be logistically easy but just because it is not easy does not mean it is not worthwhile.

Ms PUGH: I remember when the member for Macalister did a fantastic speech using sign language not so long ago. Mr Speaker, I refer to your response to question on notice No. 7 where you speak about the different projects that the Parliamentary Service has undertaken, including the Minecraft competition. I note that a number of schools in my electorate, including Jindalee, Jamboree and Middle Park state schools, participated in that absolutely fantastic initiative organised by the Parliamentary Service. Mr Speaker, can you outline the background and the purpose of this initiative and whether it was considered a success?

Mr SPEAKER: As I am sure the committee and guests know, I talk often about how proud I am of our parliamentary education programs. This is yet another piece of innovation that I think is very exciting. I attended the Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference in Adelaide as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association work. It was a terrific opportunity to talk about a number of initiatives such as our annexe refurbishment, our additional staff members and also our Minecraft competition. Our education team always looks to push the envelope. I think that is exactly what has happened with the Minecraft education program. Not only did this initial building activity engage students in learning about the structure and key features of parliament and our chamber, it also provided an addition to our suite of educational resources.

I should have said ahead of time that if some members are not aware of Minecraft or exactly what Minecraft is—I am very fortunate that I have three children and all of them have pestered me and bombarded me with Minecraft over many years, so it was not new to me—it is a product owned by Microsoft. It is where players lay blocks and use tools and other materials to build things in a virtual space. Players can share worlds and collaborate on building projects in the same world. The education version of Minecraft allows for a very safe and secure interaction between students on the same school network.

The statewide competition for schools was developed and launched in collaboration with our communications and marketing team in term 2 of this year. Parliamentary Education also engaged with Amanda Frampton, who is the Education Success Manager at Microsoft, who supports schools in using Microsoft educational tools. The competition was a great success, with 258 teams and 55 schools across 36 electorates in Queensland registering to take part. Students were provided with a resource pack, including photos and floor plans, as well as a teacher handbook detailing all aspects of the competition—a timeline, hardware and software requirements, what the rules of the competition were and how the judging would be undertaken. All of this was published on a dedicated webpage publicly available on the parliament's website.

Entries included submitting a scale model of the Green chamber, a narrated walk-through showcasing the build and a slide show documenting the team's collaborative processes and innovative use of in-game resources. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing these. I encourage members, if they get the opportunity—I have a small snippet on my Facebook page, but there is a longer version which really does showcase just how creative these students were.

Our own Parliamentary Service Minecraft experts came out of the woodwork to lend their insights and building experience to the judging process. Ten teams were selected as finalists. Of these, the overall winners were Jaxson and Louis from Fairview Heights State School in Wilsonton in the electorate of Toowoomba North. Jaxson and Louis are from different classes at the school, meaning that they could almost never work on the build at the same time. They managed to use place holders in Minecraft to leave notes for each other and mark out where certain blocks would go. We saw this team's problem-solving through the use of inverted stairs at members' desks.

Our judges were impressed by the incredible detail in the Queensland Coat of Arms behind the Speaker's desk which, I am told, took many hours of work. There are also guest appearances from a number of different characters including both former president Trump and President Biden. They managed to put everyone in. The gardener at Parliament House even got a guernsey. Jaxson and Louis, along with their parents and carers, have been advised that they have won. They are going to be accepting their prizes during a special presentation day at Parliament House, where I will take them for a tour, host them for lunch and no doubt hear a bit more about the creative process.

By holding the Build Your Parliament in Minecraft competition, we reached 1,290 students who may not have otherwise been engaged in civics education or been aware of parliament and its processes. This has increased our engagement for 2023-24 by 34 per cent on what it would have been otherwise. The education team has now published Jaxson and Louis's impressive and intricate Minecraft model of the Assembly chamber on the website, with a teacher guide that outlines a lesson

sequence teachers could use to support the use of the model in their classrooms. This resource is a wonderful addition, particularly for those in regional and remote areas who would not normally get to visit parliament in person.

At the Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference, this was a very big topic of interest and most of the presiding officers, both Speakers and Presidents, as well as clerks at the table, were pretty blown away by what we were able to achieve with this and the amount of engagement that we had with students. All in all, I think it has been a really successful piece of work.

CHAIR: I call the Manager of Opposition Business, the member for Glass House, Mr Powell.

Mr POWELL: I have a range of questions that will follow to the Clerk and to the Speaker that all pertain to question on notice No. 17, and that is around question on notice responses themselves. Firstly, to the Clerk, according to the Speaker's response to question on notice No. 17, Minister Ryan had 11 question on notice responses sent back by the clerks at the table and Minister Scanlon had 10. This is an increase from last year of six each. What additional training and/or support is the parliament providing to ensure these ministers know the requirements pertaining to question on notice responses?

Mr Laurie: Mr Speaker made a detailed ruling about his expectations in relation to questions on notice, I think, in March 2022, if I am not corrected. Therefore, that ruling sets the standard that is expected. When questions on notice come in that we feel do not comply, it is not a simple case of us saying, 'This question is not compliant. Please resubmit.' We go through the process of explaining on each and every occasion why it is not compliant. That process itself is educative, but we have not held a special seminar.

Mr POWELL: Mr Speaker, according to your response to question on notice No. 17, there were a total of 77 questions on notice sent back to ministers by clerks at the table for either not answering the question, making gratuitous political statements or directing members to a generic website. Mr Speaker, are you aware of how many ministers disagreed with the Clerk and his officers' assessments and wrote to you instead to make a determination on those rulings?

Mr SPEAKER: That is in the answer, as I understand it, member for Glass House. To add further to the response that has been provided, my main concern, as always, is to ensure that a question, if it is asked in the appropriate way, is given an appropriate response. That is important in terms of how oppositions and non-government members work in terms of trying to ascertain what information they are able to get out of government.

I have never subscribed to the idea that government ministers should be able to run interference of any kind or not be able to utilise the resources they have, because government ministers are well resourced, as are their departments. In terms of when ministers are asking for an appeal to what the process might have been, I generally take a pretty dim view of that process. I have a great deal of faith in the Clerk and our officers in what they do. I stand by the response that we have provided already.

Mr POWELL: Mr Speaker, are you aware of which generic websites the ministers were attempting to direct members to?

Mr SPEAKER: You will have to be specific on the question.

Mr POWELL: Having not seen the initial answers, is there any guidance you can provide members of the opposition as to which generic websites we were being potentially directed to?

CHAIR: You are making reference to the existing answer, I take it?

Mr SPEAKER: I will hand over to the Clerk. I think he may have the specifics in terms of those websites. I am happy to have a follow-up if that is required.

Mr Laurie: The general issue that occurs in those instances is that—for example, the minister right refer to data—it will be a page on their website that they generally refer to but not the subpage where the data resides, if that is understood?

Mr POWELL: Understood.

Mr Laurie: That is the general issue. Mr Speaker's ruling was very clear that it is the actual subpage or the database itself that should be referenced in the answer, not some more generic upper page or a home page or something like that.

Mr SPEAKER: I might also add a couple of things. If it is a question which is going to require undue resources of a minister's office or an agency then that is always taken into consideration. I would suggest that there are not that many cases where that is indeed the case. We have tried to encourage ministers to answer those questions.

I am advised that statistics collected before the ruling in March 2022 indicate that the clerk-at-the-table assessment processes that we have put in place have reduced the number of complaints significantly. I think the process seems to be self-managing to a point. I do take the Clerk's answer earlier where there was suggestion around particular training or method of training or a seminar or whatever it may be. We have not found that that has been necessary. As the Clerk also indicated, we find that this is an important learning process. No two questions are alike, which is great in terms of the variety being asked; however, it also means that clerks at the table are certainly on their toes having to provide some kind of adjudication about whether something is in order or seeking too much information.

CHAIR: I might go to the member for Glass House and then I might go to the member for Mirani.

Mr POWELL: Mr Speaker, I have a feeling you have semi answered this. Other than your ruling in 2022 and the iterative education process the Clerk and his team undertake with ministers, is there any additional training or support to ministers that your office provides around their requirements pertaining to question on notice responses?

Mr SPEAKER: In terms of my office, my executive officer, Coral-Leah Kemp, engages with the offices as well to ensure there is a very clear understanding, firstly, of the ruling that I have put in place—and it was a detailed ruling—secondly, to ensure that ministers and their offices are aware that, whilst there is an opportunity to make that attempt at an appeal, it is not something that we really entertain in many ways. We strongly discourage that kind of a process. The reason we put this new process in place with the clerks at the table essentially managing that is for quite good reason: to try to ensure there is a significant degree of consistency; and you should not ask to go to the principal to try and get an outcome one way or another, whether that is from the questioner or whether it is from the office providing the response.

CHAIR: We will just turn to the member for Mirani. We do not have a huge amount of time.

Mr ANDREW: I would like to extend my greatest thanks to all of the staff for all of the support you give to us here, so thank you for that. Mr Clerk or Mr Speaker, page 1 of the SDS refers to the Parliamentary Service's digital strategy plan, which I presume includes the Library's digital preservation project. Can you please provide an update on this project and whether the Library intends to make its extensive online historical archive of books and other documents freely accessible to the public, along the lines of the National Library's Trove collection.

Mr Laurie: First of all, in terms of digital strategy overall it is the objective of the Library to have as many of its holdings transformed into digital holdings. For example, during the course of the current year we had a storage of ministerial press releases going back to the early 1990s—or it might have been the 1970s, now that I think about it—which we understand were the only repositories of those sorts of things that are really important for historic reasons in terms of understanding policy. We took those hard copies and digitised them as a way of preserving them. We are very keen on doing that; however, we have to also realise that we are the custodians of records that are not unique to parliament. There may be, for example, collections like regional newspapers we hold in some form like microfiche, but the issue is determining whether we are the appropriate organisation spending funds on digitising them or whether somebody else is like the State Library. We have to recognise the collaborative nature of digital preservation. Our strategy emphasises the importance of establishing partnerships between the custodians of the parliament's collections and information management and technology teams. I will outline some key actions in the strategy which is being implemented.

We established an internal digital preservation community practice to facilitate knowledge sharing across the organisation. We transitioned to sustainable file formats that offer the highest probability of ensuring content. For example, some digital items that are in video may not be in a format that are usable now; they are only usable at a point in time. We defined a minimum standard of metadata to enhance discoverability, and we conduct annual assessments of digital collection risks, focusing on factors such as volume, growth, trans file formats and technical dependencies.

I should add that there are some issues around copyright that we obviously have to be very mindful of. Not all of our collection that is in digital format can be shared beyond our members because there are copyright issues. That is an impediment to us making it publicly available. I am more than happy to look at it in more detail if there is anything in particular.

CHAIR: We thank the Clerk for the very brief answer, given the member for Maiwar took extra long earlier.

Mr POWELL: Mr Speaker, if I can continue with question on notice No. 7 but this time refer to the 109 late responses to questions on notice in 2023-24. Why so many?

Mr SPEAKER: Some are actually about the questions as they are asked not being compliant and allowing an opportunity for the question to still remain active. Some of it has been because the question required some work to ensure it could actually be considered her answer. Some of the others have been about compliance with the response as well. There are two things at play here. When you look at the number of those, I would suggest it is not particularly high: it is just part of the process of ensuring we get the most complete response and in some cases allow a question to be asked which could on the surface of it be ruled out immediately. I think in terms of our processes it is a very important thing to ensure those questions are allowed to be asked.

Mr POWELL: Mr Speaker, you intimated that sometimes it might be that the minister is being asked to have another crack at the answer. As we saw in your response, ministers Ryan and Scanlon were the ones who most required that. In terms of late responses, however, Minister Fentiman submitted 26 late questions on notice responses. That is more than 10 per cent of the questions she was asked. What explanation did the minister offer for missing the 30-day deadline so many times?

Mr SPEAKER: I am reticent to get into individual ministers and what the reasons may or may not have been for those late responses. Clearly, at the end of the day I have deemed both the question asked and the response in its final form to have been complete. Some of the reasons I am aware that we may have seen some lateness, particularly from two or three ministers, may well have been around a changeover in portfolio. We have had a few changes in portfolio, as you would have noticed, switching of chairs in some cases in the parliament, as well as people taking on different roles and responsibilities. I am certain that some of it can be put down to that. Also, if there is an opportunity for a member to seek additional time in responding that is something we have given consideration to. As I said, I would prefer—as I am sure usually the questioner would—that the question is answered in its most complete form.

Mr POWELL: Understood. Mr Speaker, in some instances despite changing portfolios it is the same ministers who are repeatedly late. The other one, with 23 late question on notice responses, was Minister Farmer. That represented 29 per cent of all questions on notice she was asked. Are there any disciplinary measures taken against ministers who are repeatedly late?

CHAIR: I think the Speaker may have made reference to this.

Mr SPEAKER: I would just reiterate my previous response. Some of the same ministers who, as you would probably put it, are repeated late submitters—

Mr POWELL: Offenders.

Mr SPEAKER: I do not generally like to get verbally, member. Those are also probably the same members who have had those portfolio changes, so of course they are going to be the same members who may appear in some of those because not every minister had portfolio changes and could not really rely on that as a reason for the lateness of those replies.

As to individual ministers in terms of discipline, if there were to be disciplinary measures put in place I would have certainly undertaken that. Usually that would be an escalation in some other way. In terms of looking at the Ethics Committee, as you can see there is no member referred on that basis. My suggestion would be—and I come back to my earlier response—that this is about making sure that we have a questioner allowed to ask a question and have a minister provide the most complete response possible, subject to it being within reasonable timeframes as well as making sure it was not an undue resourcing issue for the minister's office or their department.

Mr POWELL: I have a couple of process questions for the Clerk. They are the ones I ask every time, so short, simple responses would be appreciated. In terms of the estimates hearings, could I trouble you to confirm that a direct question to a witness—for example a director-general—that is not a question of policy cannot be passed over to the minister to answer and neither can a minister add to the answer unless they are directly asked by the questioner?

Mr Laurie: Correct.

CHAIR: Mr Clerk, you do not need to have as short an answer as possible if you feel you need to explain to the House.

Mr Laurie: I think that the question is correct.

Mr POWELL: Can the Clerk reiterate the advice he provided previously regarding questions relating to matters before the CCC and whether they are permitted to be referred to under the standing orders?

Mr Laurie: I am trying to recall what the previous advice was that I had given.

Mr POWELL: I can assist you. The answer was 'yes, they can be referred to' but I want to make sure.

Mr Laurie: It sounds like it has been asked and answered. The CCC can be asked questions, like any other government entity, in this forum about budgetary issues.

CHAIR: It would be better if you could do the entire process, both questions and answers!

Mr POWELL: Mr Clerk, what was the total cost to the parliament associated with the Supermarket Pricing Select Committee?

Mr Laurie: The total cost for that committee was \$153,681. Do you want the break-up?

Mr POWELL: Before you provide the break-up, Mr Laurie, were new staff hired to attend to the Supermarket Pricing Select Committee? If not, how many staff were seconded from their permanent roles to staff the committee?

Mr Laurie: No, they were not new staff. They were staff of the committee office who were essentially seconded to that committee. In some cases they were doing dual roles—

Mr POWELL: So if you do want to provide some of the breakdown—

Mr Laurie:—but we have calculated employee expenses at about \$95,128 in equivalency.

CHAIR: We would like to thank Mr Tim Horne, the committee secretary, for taking on those dual responsibilities.

Mr POWELL: I am not sure if I have enough time for this to be answered completely, but it pertains to Auditor-General reports, with references to pages 3 and 4 of the SDS and Parliamentary Precinct Support Services that provides advisory information and support services to assist the parliament and its committees in the appropriation for these services and the practice of the CLA referring Auditor-General reports to portfolio committees. Do you have on hand how many Auditor-General's reports were referred to portfolio committees in each financial year for this parliament to date?

Mr Laurie: I can give it to you for the last financial year and I can give it to you for the parliament as a whole. There were 20 reports referred in 2023-24. There were public briefings on three of those reports and a private briefing on one of those reports, and one report was the subject of tabling. Is that what you were asking?

Mr POWELL: You did very well, Mr Clerk. You answered my subsequent question. To be clear: there were 20 reports referred, three held public briefings, one private briefing and only one has had a subsequent report tabled.

Mr Laurie: That is correct, I think.

Mr POWELL: One out of 20.

Mr Laurie: I have more tables than I know what to do with here. Yes, that is correct.

Mr POWELL: One report out of 20 has been finalised, as far as the committee is concerned?

Mr Laurie: That is correct.

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Clerk.

CHAIR: Mr Speaker, referring to the question on notice regarding the Annexe tower and the refurbishment program, can you provide further information of any other works upcoming in 2024-25 now that the members' floors and offices have been completed?

Mr SPEAKER: Yes, I am happy to. Again, I am very proud of the work that has been done. It was the biggest single project undertaken by the parliament—probably the biggest project since the Annexe itself was built in the 1970s at a grand cost, I believe, of around \$20 million. How times have changed! Obviously the works have been completed but it does not mean the job is done. We will be having a significant amount of additional work, as I mentioned in my opening statement, which relates to level 7. Level 7 has been out of action for some time. Everyone would be very aware that the refurbishment program has to include repairs and works, given the scaffolding and the base of certain pieces of equipment required for the build. Members would be very familiar with this because it is an area that has been missed in terms of being able to hold functions for members of parliament right across the spectrum.

We are hoping that these works will be completed by the end of July this year so that we can see level 7 back in action. There are not only some remedial works that needed to be done post the large build but also planned works which include re-grouting of the tiles to improve the waterproofing through to the tile bed and lower levels, roof repairs and drainage to prevent water pooling, and repairs to the underslung drainage to better assist with the removal of water from level 7 which has been a problem for some time. In addition, new audiovisual systems and furniture will be delivered to improve the functionality of the outdoor space and provide an experience for visitors.

I mentioned in earlier comments that level 3 will now move away from being members' lounges, which have been serving as temporary office accommodation and hot-desking while the tower refurbishment works were being undertaken. This will now move into the next phase where we will see level 3 turned into committee rooms. For a few reasons it is a great idea. We will have very modern committee rooms with very high-functioning audiovisual technology and the ability to have remote hearings via Zoom, Teams or whatever other method may be used. Very importantly, members of the public who wish to come along to either view or provide evidence at a committee hearing will be able to do so by coming in on the ground floor of the Parliamentary Annexe, without a need for going up into the lifts. This causes both some confusion and time issues in terms of people arriving in a timely fashion.

All of those works will be very exciting once they are completed. Work will continue in 2024-25 and we expect that those will be established post the October election. That is a very broad and open-ended timeframe because there will be a significant amount of works required. Needless to say, when we get to the next parliament, post the election, we should have committee rooms fully functioning.

Mrs McMAHON: I refer to page 1 of the SDS, which identifies the Parliamentary Service objective to promote and strengthen the institution of parliament. I am aware that during your term as Speaker the parliament has introduced a number of initiatives to encourage greater public access to the parliament's catering facilities. As members, we obviously like to host people from our electorate, as it is the people's house. Could the Speaker please advise of any future plans to expand these offerings and how it can assist members of parliament in inviting our constituents into parliament?

Mr SPEAKER: I will have to be brief, unless the chair will be flexible with time. Members would be aware that in 2019 we had our 'Sometimes Strangers' trial. For people who do not know what 'strangers' are, strangers are anyone on the parliamentary precinct who is not a member. This means our Strangers' Dining Room has been open to the public for lunchtime bookings as well as dinner services outside of sitting weeks. It has been a great success and we are looking to continue to build on that success by ensuring members are able to take full advantage of the parliamentary offerings that we have.

I understand that we will run out of time. If it is okay, Mr Chair, with the time remaining I would like to briefly make a closing statement, if that is acceptable to the member for Macalister.

CHAIR: Certainly.

Mr SPEAKER: I do want to put on record my thanks to the Clerk, Neil Laurie; Coral-Leah Kemp from my office; the Deputy Clerk, Michael Ries; directors Craig Atkinson and Monique Harmer; service area leaders James Robertson, James Rasmussen, Bernice Watson, Janine Hurley, Peter Morris, Di Hone, Mark Richardson, Cecelia Ryan, Robyn Moore and Michael Watkin; as well as other members of the Parliamentary Service who assisted in prepping the briefings for today's hearing, with a special mention to Gail Easton, the 'queen of folders'.

I would like to thank the staff of the Parliamentary Service for all their continuing efforts and dedication in delivering the services to support the work of members. As Speaker, I also take this opportunity to thank in advance each of the committees and guest members who are appearing who will work to deliver the estimates hearings over the next two weeks. Staff of the Parliamentary Service, including committee secretariats, attendants and Hansard reporters, will be very busy. I thank them for the work they do. I thank our catering staff and cafeteria for being available to ensure that members have some nourishment and sustenance.

Estimates is, very seriously, a critical part of our parliamentary democracy and I do want to say that it is in my belief one of the important checks and balances we have in making this institution even stronger. Once again, I thank all of the committee members who allowed us to appear before you today. We hope we have been able to give you fulsome answers to the questions you were seeking a response to. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Mr Clerk. The allocated time for the committee's examination of the proposed expenditure for the areas of responsibility administered by the Speaker has come to an end. I note there were no questions taken on notice. This concludes the hearing of the estimates of the Cost of Living and Economics Committee 2024. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank Mr Speaker, Mr Clerk and the Parliamentary Service officers for your attendance. I also want to thank my committee members and the visiting members who participated in the hearing today. Thank you to Hansard and the parliamentary broadcast staff together with all the other Parliamentary Service staff who have assisted here today. I declare this hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 3.02 pm.