



COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms CP McMillan MP—Chair
Mr SA Bennett MP
Mr MC Berkman MP
Ms CL Lui MP
Mr RCJ Skelton MP

Staff present:

Ms L Pretty—Acting Committee Secretary
Ms R Mills—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—OVERSIGHT OF THE FUNCTIONS AND PERFORMANCE OF THE FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2022

Brisbane

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The committee met at 9.30 am.

CHAIR: I now declare this public briefing 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, present and emerging. I acknowledge our committee member the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui, a wonderful First Nations woman, whom we are very privileged to have here in the Queensland parliament. I also acknowledge Commissioner Tammy Williams, who is also a First Nations woman. I acknowledge any other First Nations people that we have here in the meeting room today. We are very fortunate, as we know, to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we now all share.

My name is Corrine McMillan. I am the member for Mansfield and chair of this committee. I am here today with Stephen Bennett MP, the deputy chair of the committee and member for Burnett—always good to work with the deputy chair; Mr Michael Berkman MP, member for Maiwar; Ms Cynthia Lui, member for Cook; and Mr Robert Skelton MP, member for Nicklin. Dr Mark Robinson MP, member for Oodgeroo, was unable to join us this morning, but I am sure at future gatherings of our committee we will be very privileged to have his participation and knowledge when working with you all.

The purpose of today's briefing is to assist the committee with its oversight of the functions and performance of the Family Responsibilities Commission. The briefing provides an opportunity for the committee to ask questions about the operational focus, strategic goals and activities of the commission.

The committee's proceedings are proceedings of this Queensland parliament, and we are nicely reminded of that given we are sitting here in the green chamber. Our proceedings are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and will be subject to my direction at all times. The media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. All those present today should note that it is possible you might be filmed or photographed during the proceedings by media and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to turn mobile phones off or to silent mode.

Only the committee and invited officers may participate in the proceedings this morning. As parliamentary proceedings, under the standing orders any person may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. I ask that any responses to questions taken on notice today are provided to the committee by Thursday, 14 April 2022. The program for today has been published on the committee's webpage and there are hard copies available from committee staff.

McLEOD, Ms Maxine, Registrar, Family Responsibilities Commission

PATERSON, Ms Tracey, Executive Officer—Finance, Family Responsibilities Commission

WILLIAMS, Ms Tammy, Commissioner, Family Responsibilities Commission

CHAIR: Welcome, Commissioner. It is always good to see you. I also acknowledge Ms Maxine McLeod and Ms Tracey Paterson, who are also in attendance today. Commissioner, I invite you to make a brief opening statement, after which I am sure committee members will have many important questions for you.

Ms Williams: Thank you very much for the warm welcome. I, too, would like to acknowledge the traditional owners whose country not only are we gathering on today but also I have the privilege of working on throughout Cape York and Doomadgee. I also acknowledge the honourable member for Cook; four of our communities are in her electorate. I seek leave, Chair, to table a paper, which I will speak to. It is for the convenience of the committee. It includes two attachments.

CHAIR: The commissioner has sought leave to table a paper. It is so tabled. Thank you very much for that information. I ask you to proceed.

Ms Williams: An electronic copy can also be forwarded to assist Hansard. I do not intend to read that document word for word. It is there as a guide. I simply would like to walk through that document so it can prompt some questions. The paper sets out a number of operational issues that the commission and I have identified which may be of interest to this committee.

First of all, I acknowledge that the Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Hon. Craig Crawford, tabled the commission's annual report on 1 February. We are happy to take questions relating to that annual report. From the outset let me say that one of the particular highlights of that annual report is that there has been a record number of community members within our jurisdiction who were supported by the FRC through case management during the reporting period. It is the highest level we have seen since the commencement of the FRC in 2008.

There has also been a record number of people who have self-referred to the FRC and volunteered to have a portion of their welfare payments income managed. These are community members who would not otherwise be subjected to the FRC legislation but who have identified that they could benefit through a self-referral for the FRC to support them in matching them with case plan referral—so a voluntary case plan—and in addition voluntary income management.

Income management continues to be a decision of last resort for the commission. We have a range of decision options from case plan referrals, no further action and just providing a warning or giving a recommendation to community members about the kind of support or a response they might like to apply to their issue, right through to income management. We have noticed that through the introduction of the cashless debt card, which has more usability functions, there has been a greater uptake by community members on a voluntary basis to be subjected to income management. Again, I welcome any questions you may have in that regard.

The other headline feature of our annual report is contained within our significant challenges section of the report; that is, there is a supply and demand issue we are facing as part of the broader FRC ecosystem. Let me explain what that means. The FRC is a key piece of infrastructure in our communities that is able to make decisions and provide, sometimes through mandated decisions, a referral to community members to support their capacity building. Because we are seeing a demand on FRC requests for referrals from community members to be referred to local community support services, the demand on these services through our referrals is at levels which the commission is concerned our community service providers may not be able to sustain in terms of providing the requisite support that community members require. Demand and supply are not being appropriately balanced.

Those are the main issues of the annual report. In terms of other operational issues that I would like to walk you through, which I have captured in this paper, the first is in terms of FRC's funding. I recall that the last time I was before you it was noted for the two previous occasions there had been funding uncertainty about the continued operations of the FRC. I can advise that as of 11 March an MOU was signed between the parties whereby the Australian and the Queensland governments committed to support further funding to the FRC until 30 June 2023. The MOU is to apply retrospectively from the start of the current financial year. The MOU is from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023.

You will notice on page 2 of the document that I have tabled I have set out the periods of MOUs since 2014 from which the FRC has benefited. You will notice that the MOU periods are for limited periods of extension. The shortest period of extension for which the FRC has received an MOU is six months; however, because that particular MOU was signed midway through that six-month period, it only provided the FRC with three months certainty.

The other complexity we also tend to have with MOUs is the delay in signing and the retrospective nature of the MOU. You will see that I have cited an example that, although the FRC was given a 2½-year term, 12 months had already passed before the document was signed. Unfortunately, since 2014 we have operated in this perpetual state of uncertainty. Although I am very much appreciative that the FRC is able to continue its operations and have funding until June next year, it is the continued nature of MOUs negotiated for periods of this nature which is difficult for my executive colleagues and me to manage in a going concern environment.

The next issue which is connected to the MOU is that, as of Friday, I was advised by the Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships that a consultant has been engaged to undertake an independent review which has been commissioned by the department to inform the Queensland government's decision-making on the future of the FRC. I understand that one of the bases of the MOU being signed was so that the review could be undertaken over the next 12 months.

Let me say from the outset that the FRC and I are very appreciative of the MOU. We also welcome and are optimistic about the review. However, the review is problematic on a couple of bases. I refer now to page 3. I have been custodian of this position since September 2019, so my colleagues who have been part of the organisation a lot longer than me can speak in more detail about this next point. That is, the FRC has had a long history of external scrutiny. We have been subjected to three independent and publicly reported evaluation exercises. I have cited them as one in 2010 by KPMG; in 2012, the Cape York Welfare Reform; and 2018, the QUT Strategic Review of Cape York Income Management. That is, of course, in addition to regular appearances before committees and in addition to quarterly reports that the FRC provides to the board and releases publicly. Every year we produce quarterly reports as to the commission's operations and also an annual report.

I appreciate for public accountability that oversight is important, and I am not in any way wanting to prevent that from occurring. My colleagues and I are hopeful that the review can capture the successes of the FRC, inform us and provide us with lessons to improve the FRC and hopefully to be able to provide some stability going forward. However, I am cautious about this review because previous reviews have identified that there are data limitations. I now refer to page 3 and page 4 of my paper.

By way of background, the FRC is akin to a tribunal. We make decisions similar to a tribunal. It is my understanding that when the FRC was established the information reporting system that was created was very similar to that which is found elsewhere in other court registries in Queensland. The data that we collect is very much process driven. It captures processes with accuracy and it captures high-level client interactions. Unfortunately, when the FRC was established, to the best of my knowledge, there was no evaluation framework established on which future evaluations as to FRC's impact could be properly established, and therefore the data systems were not established to capture impact and outcomes.

On page 4, for your consideration, I have included a quote from the QUT's 2018 strategic review of the FRC's income management model. It identified the problems and the risks of community-level aggregated data and how it was difficult then and it is still the same information data system that the FRC has to be able to draw conclusive findings about community-level impact of the FRC.

The FRC has repeatedly indicated that it would like to use some of its surplus over a number of years to upgrade its information and data management record system. However, because of the going concern fiscal environment in which my colleagues and I have had to manage the organisation since preceding my time, since 2014, with short funding commitments, a decision has always been made at the FRC to be mindful of large IT investments if the FRC's business operations could not be assured beyond 12 to 18 months to two years. It is unfortunate that the review will be commencing and it is likely that there will be some issues with data not being able to show perhaps elements of impact, notwithstanding the FRC's identification of the need to upgrade the computer systems.

Finally, on a different matter, but it does relate in some ways to the review, I am hopeful that the review will be able to resolve once and for all the issue of the youth justice trigger. I do not propose right now to go into the law. I have included a summary of the legislation and the relevant legal issues; that is attachment 1. However, let me summarise it as this: the FRC Act was amended in 2014 to include a provision in section 43 that permits the registrar, on behalf of the commission, to receive notices from the Childrens Court should a child be convicted of an offence and they are from one of our communities. Over time, unfortunately, consequential amendments were made to the Youth Justice Act and also to the FRC Act and it has the effect that it is being interpreted at an administrative level that the courts cannot provide the registrar with those notices. So it is still in our act; section 43 still allows the FRC to receive those notices. It is being interpreted, however, that it cannot be provided to the registrar because of a consequential amendment to the Youth Justice Act—that publication of identifying information. I refer you to attachment 1.

The FRC, since 2016, I believe, has raised this issue with the Queensland government and the FRB on a number of occasions, and unfortunately it has not been resolved. The FRC has received some advice from Crown Law. It is our understanding that a clarifying provision should be inserted into the legislation to make it absolutely clear that the registrar's receipt of a notice from the Childrens Court does not in any way impinge on any other requirements of nonpublication. The commission receives, during the course of its general business, lots of confidential and highly sensitive information which we, under our legislation, must protect, including criminal record details, including child protection matters. It is unfortunate that we cannot receive the notices from the Childrens Court. The

annual report which was recently tabled includes a number of reports from the local commissioners in their community reports again requesting that there be a tidy-up of the legislation so that we can utilise those provisions as parliament had intended.

The final matter is one of thanking you. Twelve months ago, when my colleagues and I had the privilege of appearing before you, an issue that we raised before you was the matter of information exchange between the registrar and the Department of Education. On page 5 of my paper you can see that there have been positive discussions following our appearance before the committee. The education department has been working with the registrar's team and they are in the process of developing some guidelines. I understand it is yet to be finalised, but nonetheless the registrar advises me that the information has now been received in a very timely manner and has been of most assistance to the local commissioners and myself in making informed decisions. I thank the committee. I also thank the education department. We have enjoyed working alongside them in recent months. If there is anything further, I would be more than happy to take questions. Thank you for indulging me with quite a lengthy introduction.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Commissioner. The committee very much enjoys the relationship that we have with you. I also understand that after our last meeting we were able to progress that MOU quickly for you as well. Congratulations to you and your team. It really does sound like you are making some tremendous progress, particularly with individual families. To hear that families have the confidence and the trust in you to self-refer: you should be commended for that work. Thank you for all that you do for our most vulnerable communities in Queensland.

Mr BENNETT: I am really interested in the statutory obligation of the Department of Education under your act being required to provide that information. Did I hear correctly that you are still in negotiations? I am a bit disturbed, but it is quite clear in your act about the statutory obligation of other departments reporting timely. Could you expand where that is at from the Department of Education? I am enthused that you are enthused about the progress, but for the committee's benefit could you talk to the statutory obligation?

Ms McLeod: Certainly they have acknowledged the statutory obligation. The first communication I had was in August. It was very clear from them that they acknowledged that they had a statutory obligation and were most willing to work with us. What is still being worked through is an actual guideline, which I drew up and we are working on together. That has not been finalised, probably because up until now, since about September, we were receiving all the information we need. I think word has filtered through. They made it very clear that they would pass on that delegation to the deputy principals in community, and that is working at the moment. Really, it is only the official ticking off of the guideline itself.

Mr BENNETT: What would FRC expect the reporting dataset to entail? What are we wanting from Education? I read 'pre-determined obligations'.

Ms McLeod: The reporting that we get from them is the up-to-date school attendance. I manage the Cairns registry; our local registry coordinators manage the remote community registries for me. Before a conference they go to the school and request the up-to-date data. We get the published information from Education generally about four months after the term has concluded, which is why it became so critical that we need updated information. It is generally just school attendance data.

CHAIR: Commissioner, as you know, I have had a lifetime in education and our young people, particularly in our most vulnerable communities, are very important to me personally and professionally. I know that school attendance is a catalyst for, and an indication of, a whole range of possibly other issues going on in a young person's life. Could you provide the committee with an update, particularly around the schools that you look after as commissioner, in relation to how school attendance is progressing and whether our young children in your communities are attending more frequently?

Ms Williams: You are quite right in drawing a correlation between school attendance and other issues that may be impacting not only the young person but also their family. In the annual report and in our most recent quarterly report, which we have provided to the Family Responsibilities Board, we have done analysis of the notices that the commission receives. We receive notices from notifying agencies such as Education, Child Safety, the courts—the courts involving domestic violence orders and protection orders—and Housing. Our analysis is showing that, first of all, the majority of FRC clients—adults—present to the FRC with one notice type. One notice type might be just child safety notices or housing notices. That is the majority of FRC clients. Where a client is notified to the

commission over a number of trigger or notice types, we can see a linkage between child safety issues and school attendance and domestic violence and poor school attendance. That is very clear in our data.

Unfortunately—and, again, we have reported this over a number of periods—the referral pathways in our communities for appropriate service delivery support for survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence are not appropriate. We have a big demand; however, we are finding it very difficult to match clients in need of support to address their behaviours that cause domestic violence in communities. That is of concern to the registrar and me because of that very close causal link between domestic violence and school attendance, and domestic violence, child safety and school attendance.

In terms of school attendance, I do not have the current figures. I will need to take that on notice, if you would like, given that, as the registrar said, there is a four-month delay in getting data of school attendance for that particular term. Any data I do give you in respect of that percentage will be delayed, but I am happy to obtain the most recent as we can for you.

Based on what was reported in our last quarter—that is, October to December last year—the schools of Hope Vale and Coen, which are Good to Great schools, have had very good school attendance. My understanding is that consistently those two schools are being reported as either the top 2 or within the top 3 schools for school attendance in discrete communities. The other competitor for the gold, silver or bronze medal for best school attendance is the school on Thursday Island. The other school where we see some improvements—and we have captured that in the annual report—is the state school in Mossman Gorge, although it is a small number of students from Mossman Gorge.

The two schools of Doomadgee and Aurukun have faced reportedly record low levels of school attendance. They are both communities that have had a number of broader community social issues including, in Aurukun, volatile clan fighting in community, the lack of routine in community through COVID and the suspension of mutual obligations for work. It has been reported back to me, and even we found at the FRC, that attendance to our conferences was impacted because community members were missing the routine of community life, of having those obligations to report. In particular, in Doomadgee within that financial year we have had a spate of child protection issues—a cluster of young people indicating self-harm ideation including some suicide.

The schools have both reported to me that one area they struggle with is when young people have been disengaged from the school system for quite some time—whether it be because of localised flooding or because of biosecurity measures preventing the transition out of community, so people are contained within community—and the difficulty of socialising those students back into the classroom, being familiar with the routine needed prior to coming to school but also because of their numeracy and literacy levels from prolonged periods of absenteeism. We have advocated for and elevated to the Family Responsibilities Board the need, particularly at the school in Doomadgee, to have an onsite specialist to assist the school with behaviour management and child psychology to support these young people with quite challenging and complex behaviours and social issues.

The registrar just reminded me of sorry business. In our last reporting quarter, from October to December last year, we noticed a significant decrease in our data. I am talking about conference data—the number of conferences we have held and subsequently the number of decisions we would tend to make in that period. When we interrogated the data closer, it revealed to us that the high level of sorry business in communities, especially Doomadgee but in particular Aurukun, had meant that community members were not able to participate in their broader community level obligations, which include attendance at FRC conferences, because of sorry business but also most critically sending their children to school.

The FRC data is very sensitive to environmental impacts and issues. On a quarterly basis you can see big fluctuations. That is why FRC data needs to be interpreted to look at meaningful trends over a number of periods like longitudinally. I trust that has helped to give you some insight to answer your question.

CHAIR: Absolutely, Commissioner. As you know, this committee has oversight of the Family Responsibilities Commission and your work. In order to try to support you with your work, I would like to move a motion without notice, if that is okay. I move that I, as chair of this committee, write to the Department of Education requesting the attendance data up until today's date, 28 March 2022. We request from the Department of Education the attendance data for every school that sits within the responsibility of the Family Responsibilities Commissioner so that the committee can get a firm understanding of not only the schools that are travelling well but also the schools that may need extra support.

Mr BENNETT: Chair, I am not putting you on the spot, but is there scope for us to ask about the four-month delay? Can we politely ask the education department to look at a way of reducing that delay?

CHAIR: Absolutely. Thank you, Deputy Chair. The second part of my motion, then, is that the delay does not allow for a responsive situation for the commissioner in order to intervene with those families. The four-month delay needs to be explained. Further, I know hand on heart personally that that data is available right up until this morning. We would have data that indicates student attendance. If we as a committee can get that data, we would appreciate that. All those in favour? All those against? The motion is carried.

Mr BERKMAN: Without having had a chance to look at the paper you have tabled yet, I am interested to delve a little further into the point you made around the bottleneck with community service provision. If I understand your point, the FRC are struggling to find sufficient services to refer folks on to. Can you give us a clearer sense of the scope of services you are talking about—which different services are not available to meet demand—and whether there are particular service types where that need is more acute?

Ms McLeod: If I could just correct the record, it is more like a three-month delay for the education notices.

CHAIR: Thank you, Registrar. It is still too long.

Ms McLeod: If you were to look at the services that are out there in our communities, it actually does not look like there is a lack of services. They advertise that they do provide services. However, services for ATODs are very lacking and services for domestic violence support are very lacking. Both tend to be, from my understanding, very lengthy sorts of rehabilitation programs. That certainly is the difficulty in remote communities, making sure that that person attends. Even if it is for a week, it would be difficult.

There was a program for violent offending. I am trying to think of the name of the program. Lotus Glen has a program available for inmates which is very convenient for them, because they have a captive audience. We ran their program. Our deputy commissioner had amended the program slightly, so we condensed it as much as we could. We ran it for a 12-month period. This is quite a few years ago. Certainly we got attendance to the program. We did not continue to deliver it after that because the FRC has never been in the business of being a service provider. We often get called that in community, but we are not a service provider.

There are difficulties on the ground with services that during COVID just closed their doors, although they did say that they would provide telephone support. That is not such an easy thing in a remote community. They do not tend to pick up the phone and listen to someone over the phone. COVID has been a particular problem. Commissioner, did you want to add anything?

Ms Williams: I refer the committee to the annual report. In particular, we have outlined some issues on page 55, but there is some data which I will speak to shortly on pages 20 and 21. To give you a sense of the growth, when I commenced as custodian of this position midway through September 2019, in the prior financial year the FRC made 81 referrals to community support services. When I commenced in the role I undertook an internal review. The feedback from the local commissioners was their frustration at the capacity of service providers having staff on the ground to see the FRC clients or delivering programs that were not locally designed or fit for purpose, or, quite tellingly, notwithstanding the provisions of the act, there were some service providers that had received contracts to deliver services in these communities without any understanding of the FRC Act or that they are subject to our jurisdiction and would quite clearly oppose the receipt of referrals because of their policy position that treatment of community members should be done by consent and a degree of willingness held by community members or clients as opposed to mandated referrals.

A significant part of my time and the deputy commissioner's role has been to undertake some very basic statutory interpretation for our colleagues in community who receive government funding about their compliance required under the FRC Act. That has then prompted the registrar and her team to set out for service providers an MOU in plain English about what the statutory obligations of a service provider are under the FRC Act—the information exchange and that we make referrals. The referrals increased from 81 to 402 the following financial year to 519 in the financial year just past, 2020-21.

Interestingly, the willingness of community members has also changed the dynamic. In 2019-20, the vast majority of referrals made for community members for support were ordered by the commission where it was clear that community members did not have insight to their behaviours but

equally the commissioners perhaps did not feel comfortable in having appropriate conversations to help community members to get insight. The deputy commissioner and I have undertaken quite a bit of training and support.

In 2019-20 there were 23 agreements where clients had a level of insight and agreed to get referrals, whereas 302 referrals were made by order. Compare that to the last financial year, when the majority of referrals have been made in agreement with clients. Some 271 referrals were made in agreement with clients where they have exhibited insight and have indicated that they would like help from the FRC and service providers compared to 157 orders. A total of 519 referrals were made, compared to 81 made in the 2018-19.

In terms of supply and demand, my colleagues who are the CEOs of service providers, who have had a number of years of referrals at manageable levels—over the last couple of years those referrals have increased from 81 to 402 and the following year to 519—would not have anticipated such a dramatic demand on the service delivery that is required.

We are equally identifying that there are service gaps, and that is in particular in the area of youth mental health. Domestic and family violence is the other particular area that we have identified. Also, there are some concerns about gambling and the normalisation of gambling as a social activity. I trust that has given you some clarity.

Mr BERKMAN: That is a very helpful answer. Can I ask a follow-up question, Chair?

CHAIR: Member for Maiwar, I would normally allow you to do that, but respectfully I should allow the member for Cook to ask her question. If we have time, we will come back to you.

Ms LUI: In your opening statement you mentioned the record number of case management and people from community coming forward since 2018 which I think is wonderful. Can you speak on what the key drivers might be for influencing this change in community?

Ms Williams: I believe that I may have answered part of that in my earlier remarks in that some of it was a re-education of service providers in understanding their legal obligations—the need to comply with the act. Equally, it has been the training and confidence of the local commissioners. They are not legally trained. That is why the act requires that a commissioner or deputy have similar qualifications that would be required for an appointment as a magistrate to head the commission. My job is to ensure that decisions are of quality, that they are informed and that, if local commissioners form a panel to make a decision without me being part of the panel, they have a good grasp of the law and, of course, they are the experts in terms of cultural and social knowledge.

It has required some retraining for them but in particular confidence. I am advised by my colleagues that, with the threat of closure being ongoing since 2014, they truly have lacked confidence to make hard decisions. They have needed to be supported through that. There is also an understanding and an appreciation by the deputy commissioner and me that local commissioners live in community and sometimes it is not safe for them to have those difficult conversations about domestic violence or child safety perpetrators with particular community members. In those situations it is the deputy commissioner and I who will have those tough conversations so that we are then the subject of any retaliation as opposed to our local commissioners.

Their confidence has grown and they feel supported. Most importantly, I would say that there is a growing change in community members. I do not say that lightly. It is informed by a number of key trends—that is, first of all, the growing number of community members who are self-referring on a voluntary basis, to put their hand up to say, 'I would like to use the income management card, the cashless debit card.' I think that shows a growing awareness of community members of the need to take personal responsibility. I believe that it also shows a level of trust that they have in the commissioners and the commission to make supportive but proportionate and appropriate decisions that match their circumstances. I believe that it is also some credit to service providers who are responding to their re-education and embracing their role as a community support service.

Mr BENNETT: In 2018—I appreciate that that is before your time, Commissioner—I am sure you are aware that the Thriving Communities process was announced by government and in September 2021 it was rolled out by the department. Would you be able to enlighten us as to what you have seen on the ground in terms of the rollout of Thriving Communities? Is it alluding to some of the things that my colleague the member for Maiwar was talking about in terms of service delivery? Is it running in parallel or in conflict?

Ms Williams: Of the FRC?

Mr BENNETT: Of the FRC and its roles and responsibilities.

Ms Williams: I will speak first and then invite the registrar if she would like to make a contribution. Let me be very clear that the FRC is not a service provider. On the briefings I have received, my understanding is that Local Thriving Communities is the Queensland government's response to the QPC report. The Queensland Productivity Commission's report was about service delivery and the deficiencies and the need for improvement not just at the community level—better brokerage and decision-making by community members as to the purchasing of the services for their community—but that changes were needed within government. I am not across all the detail. My understanding is that Local Thriving Communities is supposed to be focused on that.

The FRC is not in the realm of service delivery. We are a decision-making entity—a quasi-judicial decision-making entity—but we have a touchpoint with the service delivery system because as part of our decisions we can make referrals by either agreement or order. Really, they are two reforms or pieces of infrastructure, be it Local Thriving Communities or whatever is created, which should really coexist. The FRC, as I hope I have been able to outline this morning, can only support our clients to change behaviour to the extent to which there is availability and quality of service delivery in their community. We very much welcome improvements in that sector and encourage all levels of government to do what they can to improve that.

That is a separate component to the FRC. It has been perplexing to the FRC and especially to the local commissioners that historically there appeared to be confusion—I am not sure of the extent of the confusion now—that it was one or the other: the FRC or Local Thriving Communities. The aims and objectives of both pieces of infrastructure are very different but are achieving and wanting the same long-term goal, and that is building capacity within community members.

How I see the FRC could add value to local decision-making in terms of purchasing improved services is that the FRC collects—we are able to tell you, as I just said on the record—the number of referrals, the types of referrals, gives some idea about particular trends and demands of needs of clients and the kinds of service gaps. We are already providing some of that information to community leaders so that they can be empowered in their discussions with government about service delivery needs in their community.

I would very much welcome the opportunity—perhaps as an outcome of this review—to strengthen some formal links between whatever that infrastructure is and the FRC so that we could share appropriate data and information so that government can make informed purchasing decisions as well as community leaders and community members can make purchasing decisions. The purchase of service delivery is not within our legislation, but we of course are highly dependent on a quality support service system.

Ms McLeod: We have always considered that Thriving Communities deals at the community level; the FRC deals at the individual level. Certainly Thriving Communities is not able to deliver what we do at the individual level. They are two completely different things. As the commissioner said, the two should work together to make the ideal environment.

CHAIR: Sadly, our time has come to an end. On behalf of the committee I congratulate you, Commissioner, on the great work you are doing and the increase in the number of self-referrals that you have seen and the increase in the number of voluntary agreements to engage with service providers and to seek help. I think you undersold the commission significantly. It really is about trust. It is about trust and it is about you caring. The committee thanks you and congratulates you for the great progress you have made in building that trust amongst our First Nations people and ensuring we are doing everything we can to ensure that their lives are better than those who have passed.

I note that there was one question taken on notice. I am happy for you not to be concerned about that. I will seek that information as chair. You are far too busy to be following up on that information. Once the committee receives that information, we will pass that on to you. I think we are okay in terms of questions taken on notice.

It is my intention that members of our committee spend some time with you in community in the coming months and years that we have jurisdiction over the Family Responsibilities Commission. We do apologise that because of COVID we have not been able to travel, simply out of respect to the vulnerability of First Nations communities, but we do hope to be able to provide any support to you that we can.

That concludes our briefing. Thank you to each and every one of you—Ms McLeod, Ms Paterson and Ms Williams. Thank you for being with us today, Commissioner. I learned a lot and I am sure our committee did in terms of the responsibilities that you hold and your role in our most vulnerable communities in Queensland.

Public Briefing—Oversight of the functions and performance of the Family Responsibilities
Commission

I thank our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's parliamentary webpage in due course. I sincerely thank each and every one of you. Safe travels. I declare the public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.32 am.