



# ***LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr PS Russo MP—Chair  
Mrs LJ Gerber MP  
Ms SL Bolton MP (virtual)  
Ms JM Bush MP (virtual)  
Mr JM Krause MP  
Ms JC Pugh MP (virtual)

**Staff present:**

Mrs K O'Sullivan—Committee Secretary  
Dr S Pruiam—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—OVERSIGHT OF THE QUEENSLAND FAMILY AND CHILD COMMISSION**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday, 1 June 2023**

**Brisbane**

## THURSDAY, 1 JUNE 2023

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### **The committee met at 12.05 pm.**

**CHAIR:** I declare open the public hearing for the committee's oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. My name is Peter Russo, member for Toohey and chair of the committee. 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 very fortunate 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 all share.

With me here today is Laura Gerber MP, member for Currumbin and deputy chair; Sandy Bolton MP, member for Noosa, via videoconference; Jonty Bush MP, member for Cooper, via videoconference; Jon Krause MP, member for Scenic Rim; and Jess Pugh MP, member for Mount Ommaney, via videoconference, who is substituting for Jason Hunt MP, member for Caloundra. Under the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 and the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly, the committee has oversight responsibilities of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. The standing orders outline the committee's oversight functions which include monitoring and reviewing the performance by the QFCC of its functions; reporting to the Assembly on any matters concerning the QFCC the committee considers should be drawn to the Legislative Assembly's attention; examining the QFCC's annual reports; and reporting to the Legislative Assembly any changes to functions, structures and procedures of the QFCC that the committee considers desirable for the more effective operation of the QFCC or the Family and Child Commission Act 2014.

The purpose of today's public hearing is to hear evidence from representatives of the QFCC as part of the committee's oversight. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings 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.

### **LEWIS, Ms Natalie, Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission**

### **TWYFORD, Mr Luke, Principal Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission; and Chair, Child Death Review Board**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement after which committee members will have some questions for you.

**Mr Twyford:** I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Yagara and Turrbal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge that we are meeting during Reconciliation Week and today is also the Global Day of Parents. I am alongside Commissioner Natalie Lewis who will also give an opening statement.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission is charged with significant responsibilities to review and improve the systems that protect our children and their families. Our focus is on influencing system improvements by assessing performance, collaborating for impact and amplifying the voices and experiences of children and families. We do this to achieve our vision that every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld.

In 2022-23 the QFCC is operating with a budget of \$12.2 million and we have a full-time equivalent staffing profile of 62 employees. These staff deliver on our legislative responsibilities to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people, manage Queensland's Child Death Register and host the Queensland Child Death Review Board. Over the last year we have repositioned and redefined our work in response to independent and external reviews. We have done

this to ensure we are investing our focus and efforts in places where we can influence positive change. We have adopted a new operating model and a structure, including a dedicated First Nations and child rights workforce that reports directly to Commissioner Lewis.

There have been many highlights of the commission in the last year. Our reviews and research have gained attention and contributed to significant system change. Specifically, the release of our reports into filicide deaths, sudden unexpected deaths in infancy, system responses to domestic violence, swimming pool drownings and the use of interventions with parental agreement have stood out for their impact. Likewise, our advocacy on the use of spit hoods on children, school disciplinary absences, adolescent mental health support and extended care for children in care helped to identify opportunities for improvement. Our work to record, learn from and prevent child deaths continues to expand and grow supported by the release of our Safer Pathways through Childhood Framework which establishes our priorities and governs how we collaborate and share important information with qualified researchers.

To amplify the lived experiences, our Youth Advocate network also continues to expand and has been highly active in informing government policies and inquiries. We have funded young Queenslanders to share their stories, experiences and opinions with ministers, parliaments and state and national conferences. We have continued to strengthen our partnerships with other organisations towards achieving our strategic objectives. Our advisory council now comprises 26 members from across the Queensland sector to ensure that the commission continues to be focused and effective. We also facilitate, lead and chair the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians group, the associated First Nations caucus and last week we coordinated the annual meeting of Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review Register and Research group. This month Brisbane will host an international parenting conference that we sponsor with attendees from over 55 countries focused on what research tells us is good parenting. Brisbane also recently hosted the launch of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study.

Into the next year, the commission has a strong work program designed to identify issues affecting children and families and drive improvements. We are progressing influential reviews and research that look at children and families' experiences of multiple service systems, including into the use of police watch houses, frontline responses to parental methamphetamine addiction, common trajectories among our child death cases and understanding the increase in the use of permanent care orders. We are currently surveying the frontline workforce and the community and, through a new project, we are surveying parents with involvement in the child protection system to better understand their views and experiences of that system. We will soon be publishing the outcomes of our Growing Up in Queensland report, the outcomes of our workshop in how government responds to young people with high-risk behaviours and the results of our workforce survey. There are many issues facing children and families in Queensland. The QFCC has a strong work program to identify these issues, give a voice to the children and families experiencing them and to help government drive solutions. I am confident we are making a positive impact. Thank you for the opportunity to present. I will now hand over to Commissioner Lewis.

**Ms Lewis:** Thank you. Yaama maliyaa. Good morning. When reading the committee's report from last year we were encouraged to see the committee's acknowledgement of the work that we were doing to adopt a child rights approach to our work and also the increasing focus on First Nations children and the impacts across multiple systems that impact their lives.

When reflecting on the previous 12 months and on our key achievements over that time, we have certainly continued to implement a child rights approach to our work and have continued to raise the visibility of the experiences and the aspirations of First Nations children, young people and their families across a range of social policy issues and the full body of work of the QFCC. We have leaned into spaces where opportunities exist to influence positive change for First Nations children and young people. Importantly, we have demonstrated a willingness to engage specifically for the purpose of creating opportunities where they may not have been previously recognised.

As our Principal Commissioner mentioned, in the last 12 months we have seen the establishment of the First Nations children's rights team and what is important about that is that while we are a very small team of six staff, when we appeared before you last year I had no direct reports so that progress has certainly been welcomed and it is certainly making an impact. We have continued to participate actively through our membership in reform governance committees and advisory groups such as the QPS Domestic and Family Violence Task Force, the Closing the Gap Justice Policy Partnership, and the Early Childhood Policy Partnership. I continue to be a member of the Queensland First Children and Families Board for oversight of the Our Way strategy and co-chair the blue card reforms that are happening in Blue Card Services.

Nationally I am also a member of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group for Safe and Supported, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, the Australian Child Rights Taskforce and convening the national caucus of First Nations Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates. Our active participation in these governance mechanisms enables us to influence much more broadly the reforms that are going to eventually impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of this generation and the next.

Our key focus areas over the next 12 months are certainly the blue card review which was recommended by this committee; launching our child rights report next month; the First Nations children's report—our inaugural report—celebrating the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland; continuing with our ongoing monitoring of overrepresentation in the statutory child protection system through the release of our Principle Focus snapshots; and also, outwardly focused by convening child rights dialogues with different parts of our system, the first being with the judiciary and legal profession, and beyond that undertaking regional dialogues where we are very explicit about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who live in regional and remote communities.

As the committee is aware, section 42 of our act provides for a review of the effectiveness of the act as soon as practicable after five years of operation. As you are also aware, as required prior to the legislative review, an independent review of the QFCC's functions and performance was undertaken and tabled in 2021. One of the key findings of that review was the need to consider whether legislative reform was required to provide appropriate authority and a focus for the role of the commissioner and whether there needed to be a more intentional and active role for the QFCC in relation to issues that impact specifically upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Earlier this year, a discussion paper was distributed by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General to key stakeholders requesting submissions to identify opportunities for improvement to the QFCC's legislative framework to make sure that it is appropriate, contemporary and fit for purpose. The QFCC provided a submission that made a number of suggestions to address those issues raised in the independent review. They included the establishment of a dedicated, independent and resourced commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to establish compatibility of the powers between the commissioner and the principal commissioner in the exercise of the performance of the QFCC's functions; a more explicit role for the commission to promote and protect the rights of children and young people; and a new explicit objective to promote the rights, development, wellbeing and best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland.

The suggested amendments align with the commission's role with the Queensland government's commitment to reframing the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through treaty, truth-telling and healing. These are welcomed and critical commitments to enable structural reform and importantly to give practical means to address the systemic inequities that continue to be experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland. Establishing and empowering a commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and families provides dedicated leadership and oversight of systems to promote and protect the rights, development and best interests of our children. It will also support meaningful and very deliberate participation in whole-of-government reforms to reframe the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.

It is my sincere hope that the opportunity to further strengthen the commission's legislative framework is given due priority and that the review continues with an appropriate degree of urgency. I thank the members of the committee for your continued commitment and for the role that you play to ensure that the QFCC operates optimally, effectively and responsibly as we together continue to raise awareness and advocate for the rights, safety and wellbeing of all children in Queensland.

**Mrs GERBER:** Thank you for your presentation today. Commissioner Twyford, I want to ask you some questions in relation to the policy paper that the QFCC released, I think in March of this year, around legislative change. You highlighted some limitations. One of those limitations was obviously also highlighted in the royal commission into the tragic case of the two autistic boys and the outcomes for them. The limitation was essentially that the QFCC does not have the power to request confidential information in relation to reviews that are referred to the QFCC. Firstly, I want to understand how many cases might have been referred to the QFCC for review since 2015 in the context of what I have just talked about. You may not know that.

**Mr Twyford:** I may need to take that on notice. Can I suggest that the question would be the number of referrals under section 22 of our act to conduct a specific inquiry?

**Mrs GERBER:** Yes, that is the information I am after, thank you. In relation to any cases that might have been referred to the QFCC for review, I understand that confidential information is not defined but, broadly speaking and reading from the transcript of the royal commission, it does not include the case files of children known to Child Services. Does it include confidential case notes?

**Mr Twyford:** It does get a bit grey. We do not have the power to request confidential information as undefined. Depending on the person, that can apply to case notes, case files and anything that relates to a specific individual. However, we do have strong relationships with departments where we are able to demonstrate that the access to those notes and files will assist us in developing a thematic or systematic finding for the purpose of doing our reviews. Often we will receive some case notes de-identified for that purpose where it falls within what we and the department mutually agree would be beneficial to look at. What we do not have is an explicit lever when a department says, 'No, we don't want to hand that over.' We have no ability to move beyond their position.

**Mrs GERBER:** But in your capacity as the chair of the Child Death Review Board, you do have that ability; you do have that lever?

**Mr Twyford:** That is correct.

**Mrs GERBER:** In the context of the answer that you just provided, are you able to confirm, with any of the cases that have been referred to the QFCC, if you had had access to confidential case notes using the mechanisms that you have just talked about? Again, you may not be able to answer.

**Mr Twyford:** It gets complicated because of the time period and the change in our legislation to introduce the Child Death Review Board. A section 22 referral can suggest that we should be able to access confidential information. Again, it goes back to that relationship with the departments. I myself, in the 18 months I have been in this role, have not had a section 22 case referred to me by government.

The QFCC is self-initiating reviews based on our read of data and where we are concerned. A good example of that is our current look into why children are having extended stays in watch houses. In that instance, I have asked for and sought case files for the Queensland young people who have the longest periods of stay in watch houses in the past 12 months. I have not been able to get access to the case files but the departments have summarised those case files to give me the data that I need such as what date and time was the entry and what date and time was the exit, what was the age and status. I am not accessing the confidential information, but the department has provided me with what I need. If that was a Child Death Review Board review I would have the powers under the act to request the case file explicitly and do my own analysis of that document.

**Mrs GERBER:** There is a clear benefit to that for you as the Commissioner of the QFCC?

**Mr Twyford:** Absolutely. It would strengthen the quality of our reviews.

**Mrs GERBER:** In asking that question I am also trying to get to the bottom of is in relation to cases that have been referred to the QFCC from the government and the current mechanisms that you have available to you around the relationship and whether or not that is giving you what you need. When I am asking you how many confidential case notes you have been able to obtain, or summaries of, I am trying to understand that so that I can understand how that is working in practice.

**Mr Twyford:** In that case it might be best that I take it on notice and, by case, set that out. Each answer will be different subject to the case and what year the case occurred.

**Mrs GERBER:** I am not sure if you are able to specifically talk about the deaths of the two Conley girls. I know that that was referred to the QFCC for review. I believe the government referred that to you for review. Have you been able to obtain any confidential information in relation to that review?

**Mr Twyford:** Yes, we were. We were able to produce a report that was provided to government in return after that request.

**Mrs GERBER:** Is that the 'Seeking safety—keeping children safe' report?

**Mr Twyford:** There is a public version that de-identifies the findings and more thematically provides analysis across the issues that arose in that case. But I need to be clear that linking the two reports—that matter and that public report—gets complex and there are broader findings in the public report.

**Mrs GERBER:** So the full report has not been published? Are you saying there are two different reports, one given to government and one that has been made public?

**Mr Twyford:** One was provided to government. Can I take that question on notice? I may be confusing two separate cases. There is currently a coronial inquest underway that I have just been prepped on. I might be confusing the two situations.

**Mrs GERBER:** Okay. It is *Seeking safety—Keeping children safe when they remain at home during Child Safety interventions. A system review following the deaths of two young children*. That is the full title of the report that I have just referred to.

**Mr Twyford:** And that was referenced in the royal commission hearing recently, yes.

**Mrs GERBER:** The question is: why has that not been published in full, if it has not been published in full?

**Mr Twyford:** In my statement to the royal commission I outlined that there was a full report done and provided to government under the terms of reference provided to the former principal commissioner under section 22. It was then up to government as to how that report would be used and a lessons learnt summary of that report was made publicly available.

**CHAIR:** Before you go on, Luke, if you need some of your guys to sit at the table with you then they are more than welcome. We do not need to formally acknowledge them unless they want to be. I am more than happy for them to sit at the table with you and Natalie if that will assist.

**Mr Twyford:** Thank you.

**Mrs GERBER:** Can you say why that report cannot be released to the public? I understand what you have just said, but why can the full report that you provided to government not be made public?

**Mr Twyford:** I think it is important and I did provide in my testimony to the royal commission that there are times when conducting a review and exploring the lives of a specific family is important and we need to learn from that. That advice is provided to government decision-makers to make the necessary system changes. It is not necessary that the public should see, to the extent that the government decision-makers need to, into the lives of that family. Therefore, as the Principal Commissioner I will often make strategic decisions around what information I publicly produce to aid community understanding and public understanding, and what information I produce to those with the ability to influence and make decisions. I want to caution that, as chair of the Child Death Review Board, we have reviewed over 60 cases this year. I do not think there is any public good from publishing the details of each of those death cases. However, it is very important that the broader lessons learnt and the recommendations of the board thematically are public and are publicly reported on with transparency.

**Ms BOLTON:** Good morning to you both. Thank you so much for the work you do. I note from your opening statement that the volumes are enormous. Within those volumes, we have had two years of a housing crisis. Have any of those reports incorporated the impacts thereof on the wellbeing of children?

**Mr Twyford:** I will make a start and Commissioner Lewis can join in. Certainly, our section 40 report that forms the lead part of our annual report requires us to produce in that report that is tabled in parliament our assessment of the performance of the youth justice and child protection systems against state goals and national goals. In last year's section 40 report we certainly highlighted a couple of areas related to housing that were of concern to us. One was the overall cost-of-living and housing pressures being experienced by people throughout Queensland which then have the chance and opportunity to impact on their parenting capacity. More specifically, we identified that children leaving out-of-home care in Queensland are increasingly accessing homelessness support services and that homelessness support services are less likely and less able to meet the needs of those people leaving out-of-home care. That is a huge concern for us.

Thirdly, I believe in some of our broader advocacy work, particularly around domestic violence and the research sponsored by the Child Death Review Board into domestic violence, we made commentary around the impact of homelessness on people fleeing violence and how that can mistakenly translate into a child safety matter where mum—hypothetically—is now homeless and struggling to provide care for infant children as a result of a domestic violence situation that she is fleeing. It is about trying to be clear that our policy responses across the human services spectrum are all connected; in that case, responding to domestic violence, housing solutions and to child safety needing to better work together.

**Ms Lewis:** I agree. You would be hard-pressed to find any of the work we have done where housing has not been identified as a significant issue. In the space of child protection, the impacts of overcrowding and unstable or unsafe accommodation are clearly risk factors that brings families to the attention of child protection services. Similarly, whether we are looking at factors that are impacting on young people in conflict with the law in terms of their entry into that system or, indeed, their sort of considerable vulnerability in exiting that system, the risk of homelessness and the inability to access safe and stable housing causes a problem on both sides of those equations. Housing is a critical issue.

We have really tried to focus on looking at drivers and causes as opposed to responses in tertiary systems. We cannot do that without looking at housing issues, the impact of homelessness and unstable and unsafe living arrangements for children.

**Ms BOLTON:** Housing would be a standard that you would look at. Going back, how many years ago would you have flagged housing's contribution not only to maybe youth justice but also the decreased wellbeing of our children? If that is a standard, would it have been five years ago, eight years ago?

**Ms Lewis:** I have been at the commission for three years now, but even prior to that in my previous role there was never a moment where that was not on the radar. Certainly, it has been a contributing factor for a long time. I think now we certainly see it given maybe more clarity or prominence in some of the work we are doing because we consider safe and stable housing to be a right. When we are looking at the rights of children, that is clearly one of the ways that we look at any of the issues that we are dealing with. We certainly position that as a right and one that is unmet for far too many children.

**Ms BOLTON:** I note the findings of the report—I think it was related to a child-rights approach to systemic accountability; it was a rapid review of QFCC recommendations. I am trying to get a better understanding of when you make recommendations. If it were a decade ago and you are making recommendations regarding a staple like housing, how is that monitored and tracked to see whether or not the recommendations are actually acted upon? What type of system do you run to be able to monitor that?

**Mr Twyford:** Just prior to my arrival, the QFCC did lead the KPMG external review of outstanding recommendations and produced a quite robust report on all the recommendations made by the QFCC over its years and tracked agency positions on whether or not the agencies believed they were completed. There was then a round of engagements by QFCC senior officers with those departments to test and validate the departmental positions. I then commenced in the role and was able to work with some departments to suggest that even more could be closed, not because the recommendations had been explicitly met but because in broad policy terms the issues either had moved on or were now receiving greater attention. We do keep a track of our recommendations, with a particular focus on Child Death Review Board recommendations, and produce an annual report on government's actions over the last 12 months for each recommendation. I am proposing that we do an every-second-year review of recommendations that remain outstanding.

I flag with the committee that the National Children's Commissioner is leading a body of work to look at recommendations nationally. The anecdotal information she currently has is that, over the last 10 years in the area of child safety, royal commissions, committees of inquiry and others have made over 2,000 recommendations. It is certainly a business where we can accumulate a lot of recommendations. From my perspective, it is important that for each one a reform plan is generated, an action plan is generated and people take steps on the right path. In tracking recommendations such as improvements in public housing from 10 years ago we need to be very conscious that, with every budget cycle, every departmental change and every new strategy around public housing, those recommendations should be creating impetus and informing the reform areas of government. I think in this year's section 40 report we will bring more focus to how government departments across Queensland are introducing strategies and reforms aligned broadly to all the recommendations rather than recommendation by recommendation.

**Ms BOLTON:** In terms of the KPMG report, what percentage of recommendations would still be outstanding—say, those recommended five years ago and still have not been implemented?

**Mr Twyford:** I do have that information available on our website. It is not currently in front of me. It is a low statistic. I will ask one of my staff to look it up. If they can hand me the answer before the end of the hearing, I will read it on to the record.

**Ms BOLTON:** Thank you so much.

**Ms BUSH:** Hi Luke and Nat, lovely to see you both again. Congratulations on another fantastic year. I wanted to look at the *Taking lives* filicide report. Obviously, that is something of interest to me and ought to be of interest to us all. There were some pretty big findings in that. How will that inform government policy but also community responses around identifying earlier how we might prevent these types of deaths from occurring?

**Mr Twyford:** Thank you for that question. I am quite proud of that report and research commissioned prior to my time. Certainly, across the child death review sector, it has received a lot of attention in standing out as a body of work that no other jurisdiction or group has done to the extent

that it was done here. Having said that, I think the research in that report does not give us clear answers on how to automatically identify and resolve the tragic case of filicide. There is a bit of a concern that, with that extensive research, what have we learnt that we could do differently. The commentary around red flags certainly appears in our summary of that research. There are very clear stand-out findings in cases where a parent has taken the life of their child. It generally includes: a history of domestic violence; mental illness; a threat to kill the child, whether offhand or serious in nature—but any verbalisation of wanting to kill your own child is a clear risk factor; and custody battles and disputes. The unfortunate thing is that there are so many families where those risk factors are present and not all will engage in the tragic act of filicide.

Whilst the research is clear that they are apparent risk factors and indicators where we need to pay attention, there is still an important gap for us to continue our research in the area across-the-board. Having said that, the research and its summary have been provided to the frontline workforces in both police and child safety. The Commissioner and the Director-General accepted and took on the research findings. It reinforces their current practice models around identifying risk factors, recording those risk factors and making sure there is collaborative information sharing. Certainly, in that research Queensland stood out as having a filicide rate higher than most other Australian jurisdictions. I am yet to see the research that could start to provide a reason as to why that is the case.

**Ms BUSH:** Thank you. I take your important point that a number of families might present with some of these things and will not continue through, so how do you detect. Certainly, police and child safety are doing some of this work, but I thought health really emerged as an area that could have a significant impact not just in hospitals, emergency and maternity wards but potentially GPs doing more. Is there anything happening in that space of which you are aware that you can comment on?

**Mr Twyford:** I know that the report was provided to the Director-General of health. I can follow up where that is at. I also add that we continue to see a significant focus on mental health and mental health responses. I am calling for mental health responses to be more family focused. It is an area where the professionals can see the client, deal with the client and the presenting issues in that client, but, recognising that that client is a parent is critically important because that should change—and I hope it changes—the understanding of the risk being presented. It is not just the risk for the client, it is also the risk for their family. That is a risk which I can see in the current system.

**Ms BUSH:** I am looking forward to hearing more about it.

**Mr Twyford:** I will fill in the gap. The KPMG rapid review considered 208 recommendations, finding: 55 per cent had been completed; 34 per cent were still in progress; and three per cent had not commenced.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Could the commissioners inform us about progress on the blue card matters? We had a good discussion about them I think eight or nine months ago where the committee was told during the course of the inquiry that many recommendations from a prior report had not been implemented. You focused on particular ones. Could you give us an update about that to your knowledge?

**Ms Lewis:** Absolutely. With all of the recommendations that came through from the committee in terms of raising the priority and the urgency around the response of a number of those recommendations, that has certainly been incorporated into the oversight implementation plan for all of the blue card recommendations. Each of those that were recommended by the committee to become a focus or to be progressed with priority have certainly moved up and have commenced in terms of implementation. There has been some pretty positive progress, probably more in the few months since the report was delivered by the committee than probably in the two years prior. I think that has helped to move things along.

In terms of the particular review that was requested that the QFCC is undertaking, I can advise that we have received the data that we require from Child Safety to look at provisional approvals. We also now have the comparative data from Blue Card Services where there was a difference in the outcome of the assessment from both of those departments. We are probably looking at commencement next week around doing the mapping against each of the findings. We hope within probably a month after the review commences to be able to provide a report back about that particular recommendation for blue cards.

**Mr KRAUSE:** To our committee.

**Ms Lewis:** Yes.

**Mr KRAUSE:** In relation to a 2017 report, I think—the ones you highlighted previously—can you tell us whether any of them have been ticked off?



**Ms Lewis:** Not in their entirety, no.

**Mr KRAUSE:** It is work in progress.

**Ms Lewis:** They have certainly commenced in terms of shared decision-making, looking at the collaborative agency panels for assessment of suitability. Those trial sites are almost to a point of agreement and they should be commencing very soon.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Has the department worked closely with the QFCC?

**Ms Lewis:** Yes, they have.

**Ms BUSH:** Nat, it is great to hear you have a team around you now. The First Nations report that you have mentioned, focusing on celebrating the strength of our First Nations young people, can you tell us a little bit about that? What I am particularly interested in is how you see that better informing what should be a really positive, strong narrative around our First Nations young people, particularly in our regions.

**Ms Lewis:** We have been very deliberate about wanting to focus on how we contribute to the notion of reframing the relationship with First Nations Queenslanders. Too often the characterisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is about being on the bottom of a particular list or over-represented in a particular system. I think that causes us to overlook the fact that 80 per cent of our children are thriving and are doing well. They are achieving at school and finishing school.

I think a lot of the focus tends to be on that negative narrative. Certainly there is urgency, and we need to address those disparities. When we are trying to reframe the relationship, we have to start to balance it up and give a true indication or a true reflection of who our children are and how our communities and our families operate as communities of care. Being able to provide a platform and a profile to say, 'This is our normative experience,' I think will assist us in reshaping that relationship.

Does it mean that we shy away from some of the challenges? Absolutely not. I think that we need to create space for our children, our families and our communities to present a truer version of themselves than what is often done through media and even through some of the reports that we provide.

**Ms BUSH:** I look forward to that. Do you have any dates around when you expect that to be finalised and published?

**Ms Lewis:** Absolutely. Our launch date for that will be National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day on 4 August.

**Ms BUSH:** Will you be writing to the committee as a reminder to let us know when that is made public?

**Ms Lewis:** Most certainly.

**Ms BUSH:** Great. I am very interested. If there is time, I have more questions.

**CHAIR:** I will come back to you.

**Ms BOLTON:** I have a couple of quick questions. On page 31 of your annual report you talk about the gap in central governance of the state's child protection system with the Interdepartmental Committee no longer operating. There is that one, plus the closure of the oneplace community services directory.

**Mr Twyford:** In answer to the last question about oneplace, we funded and maintained that for many years following the Carmody commission of inquiry, but we had a point-in-time check on the success of that. We had measures around the number of new Queenslanders accessing that site and also a rating around did they find it useful. What we found over the two or three years before this one was that usage was declining. Queenslanders were saying they were getting their content from Ask Izzy—a separate and different site—as well as generally using Google to find services. Queensland also introduced a connect service where people could phone and visit and get direct access and referrals on site. I no longer and the commission no longer saw the need to maintain oneplace on that basis and it was closed on 30 June last year.

In relation to the first part of that question about page 31 and part of our section 40 report that tried to identify that there are opportunities to improve cross-government working in the area of children and families, that is content from 12 months ago now, being based on 30 June 2022. It continues, however, to be an issue that I am interested in. We have multiagency panels focused on youth justice. We have SCAN teams involved in child protection. We have high-risk panels and committees around domestic violence responses.

At the more strategic level of government it is about how we are bringing together what the commission sees, and that is the gaps between our portfolios where families and children are most at risk, understanding, for example, by way of analogy, that school disciplinary absences in education are contributing to social issues and youth justice, crime and policing issues. We—and I am speaking generally—need to get better at working across portfolios and understanding the cause and effects and the push and pulls and the different levers if we are to truly make Queensland a place where all Queensland children are loved and safe and have their rights upheld.

**Ms BOLTON:** Basically, you are saying that the Interdepartmental Committee ceased in 2021 but that it needs to come back. Is that what you are saying in a nutshell?

**Mr Twyford:** In a nutshell, with the proviso that that Interdepartmental Committee was visible to us in the commission. It may have been replaced. I expect it has been replaced with other forms of senior leaders in Queensland working together, but it is not as visible or transparent to the commission as that former model was.

**Mrs GERBER:** I want to talk to you a bit about foster care models. I want to understand whether or not the commission is looking at the New South Wales Professional Individualised Care model. The New South Wales government is currently supporting the Professional Individualised Care model for foster kids. For context, it is around paying a psychologist or therapeutic expert to essentially leave their day job and become a full-time foster carer for a child who is a ward of the state. It is really only used for kids who have ended up in motels or group homes who have been bounced around a lot and really need that individualised care. Is the commission aware of the work that is happening in New South Wales? Is that something that we are looking at in Queensland?

**Mr Twyford:** Broadly speaking, the answer is yes. We are aware of that model, the Victorian model and some of the pilots currently occurring in Queensland in specific areas. However, for this financial year coming, I do think the commission will do further work on the gap between foster care as we currently have it in Queensland and residential care. Our starting point is that there needs to be more options in between. The professionalisation of foster care, or professional foster carers, could form part of a more integrated service system.

Our review, as we frame it up—and it is yet to be scoped—would be looking at how would we do that; what are the cost drivers and benefits of doing so for current carers, the sector and Queensland taxpayers more broadly, so bringing an economic lens to that; and, looking at that issue from the other end, is our current residential care system effective in meeting the needs of the young people in that system and what is the step down from residential care? If it is volunteer caring, that step may be too large, so what would a midpoint be?

In answer to your question, we are very alive to the issue. There are concerns across Australia. Most jurisdictions are only recruiting enough foster carers to replace the ones they are losing. There is a lot of effort for a net sum minimal gain. It is a national issue around the number of Australians volunteering to open their homes as foster carers. I am aware that other jurisdictions are looking at what are the different models that could form part of the solution. The QFCC will assist Queensland to do some of that analysis.

**Mrs GERBER:** What are the time lines for that review?

**Mr Twyford:** It is not yet scoped. We have flagged it as something that is of concern to us that we should look into. I would expect it to be on the 2023-24 work plan.

**Mrs GERBER:** In relation to Queensland and the gap that we just talked about being a national issue, but focusing on Queensland, can you give the committee any further details around the attrition rate—that is probably not the right word—the number of foster carers who are leaving the system and our ability to recruit? Do you have any of that data?

**Mr Twyford:** There is data in our annual report but that is now 12 months old. I am happy to take that on notice and provide the most recent data we have.

**Ms BUSH:** Luke, coming back to your future work program as it is now defined, you mentioned two reviews: one on children and young people who are having interactions with multiple service systems and the other around permanent care orders. Can you tell us a little bit about what that—what that is likely to look at, any areas that you are interested in looking into specifically and when you anticipate that they will be public?

**Mr Twyford:** Yes, within the next quarter, potentially for both reviews. The review of children with multiple touch points stems from the Child Death Review Board reviews and our discussion with the sector on young people who are demonstrating high-risk behaviours. It is very clear that our young people who are at that end of what we see as the service system have had multiple touch points with

the system that have let them down. They are generally out of school for the last 12 months. They have had contact with police and contact with the youth justice system. They are sleeping rough or homeless, and they probably have a childhood history of abuse, neglect and trauma. When you consider all of those failings in that young person's life and then see them as an adolescent with behaviours that we wish they did not have, it is incumbent on us to try to understand what we could have done earlier and where was the missed opportunities. That is the purpose of that review.

The permanent care orders is more clearly an issue that was identified in current statistics and data from the department that there has been a pretty significant increase in the number of children receiving a permanent care order. We want to understand who those children are, who the carers receiving the permanent care orders are and what might be behind that increase. Is there anything you want to add?

**Ms Lewis:** In terms of permanent care orders, from the point of time when they were introduced to now, we have seen especially across the last two years a significant increase in their use. Initially when they were introduced, there had been some concerns raised by stakeholders about the lack of oversight, given that for permanent care orders there is not necessarily any ongoing contact or case reviews. At the time, those concerns were allayed by an estimation that they would not necessarily be used very often. When we are seeing those significant increases, the question that I particularly have is: is it now time to introduce a process of oversight of those decisions to ensure that the placement is capable of maintaining, in accordance with the legislation, the best interests of a child not just at a point in time but for the duration of that child's life? It is really important to have that additional layer to look at is the care adequately resourced and supported to be able to fulfil those obligations around the enduring right to best interest.

**Ms BUSH:** Yes, I think we will all be interested in that. Back to the service system and kids with multiple interactions. I hear from your response that the point to is really identify what are the systems, failures and improvements that could help circumvent their journey.

**Mr Twyford:** That is correct, and how do all systems work together for that better outcome rather than hoping some other portfolio will resolve that young person's needs.

**Ms BUSH:** I assume that you are going to look at information sharing as part of that.

**Mr Twyford:** Yes, absolutely.

**CHAIR:** There were a couple of questions taken on notice: the number of cases the government has referred for review under section 22 of the act since 2015 and, of the cases referred, have you had access to confidential case notes; secondly, updated data on the number of foster carers in Queensland as per the 2021-22 annual report. If possible, if you are able to have that information to the secretariat by the close of business Tuesday, 6 June so we can include this in our deliberations. If there is trouble with the time lines, please communicate with the secretariat. We will understand and be very accepting of reasonable requests. A transcript of the proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course, Thank you to Hansard and the committee secretariat.

**The committee adjourned at 1.01 pm.**