

WEDNESDAY, 14 JULY 2004

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B—CHILD SAFETY

Estimates Committee B Members

Mrs J.M. Attwood (Chair)
Mr J.M. English
Mr C.J. Foley
Mr A.P. Fraser
Mr V.G. Johnson
Mrs R.N. Menkens
Mrs D.C. Scott

In Attendance

Hon. M.F. Reynolds, Minister for Child Safety

Department of Child Safety

Ms R. Sullivan, Director-General
Ms N. Deeth, Deputy Director-General
Ms M. Ryan, Executive Director, Operations Directorate (Acting)
Ms C. Taylor, Director, Child Protection Branch
Ms S. Godsave, Director, Human Resources Branch, Corporate and Executive Services
Ms D. Mulkerin, Implementation Leader, Child Safety Implementation Unit
Mr G. Carlyon, Policy Adviser (Caucus Liaison), Office of the Minister for Child Safety

The CHAIR: I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee B open, and I welcome the Hon. Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety, advisers and members of the public who are in attendance this morning. Please note that Mr Horan, the member for Toowoomba South, replaces Mr Johnson as deputy chair here today. Mr Johnson was unable to attend the meeting due to his required attendance at a funeral in Longreach to speak the eulogy in honour of Sir James Walker.

I will introduce other members of the committee. I am Julie Attwood, member for Mount Ommaney, Chair of Estimates Committee B today. I have next to me Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge; Andrew Fraser, the member for Mount Coot-tha; John English, the member for Redlands; and on the opposition side I have Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin; Chris Foley, the member for Maryborough; and a visitor today, Jann Stuckey, the member for Currumbin.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2004 for the portfolios of the Minister for Child Safety, the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. The committee will examine estimates for organisational units in the following order—the Department of Child Safety, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, the Department of Police and the Department of Corrective Services.

The committee will suspend proceedings for a 15-minute break from 10.30 a.m. to 10.45 a.m., lunch from 1 till 2 and a 15-minute break from 3.30 p.m. to 3.45 p.m. I remind members that the time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes to answer. A warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time for questions at today's hearing is allotted to non-government members. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers to identify themselves before they answer a question. The proceedings today are governed by the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. As such, members of the public cannot participate in the proceedings and may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee.

In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television coverage and sound broadcasts will be allowed only for the chair's opening comments and the minister's introductory statements. I ask that all mobile phones be switched off, and I declare the proposed

expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety now open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you have five minutes to make your opening statement.

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and members of the estimates committee. As the inaugural Minister for Child Safety, I am proud to say that since my appointment in February this year we have laid very important groundwork for the new Department of Child Safety to ensure it is fully operational in December this year and we are meeting our commitments towards reform of the child protection system in Queensland. We have also appointed a week and a half ago our first director-general, Dr Robin Sullivan, who is beside me, and beside Robin our first deputy director-general, Norelle Deeth. These are two outstanding appointments and I would like to again congratulate Robin and Norelle on their appointment.

Can I also take this opportunity to thank my ministerial staff for the dedication and professional support they have given me and all members of the Department of Communities who have been working with me, including the Child Safety Implementation Unit. They have done a great job and I would like to thank everyone today for their commitment in that regard.

In the 2004-05 financial year, the primary focus of the new department will be to fully implement the recommendations of the foster care audit and the CMC report. To build a new agency that focuses singularly on the needs of vulnerable children and young people, the department has been given a very solid operating budget of \$269 million and \$35 million for capital. This is the largest investment in child protection ever made by a Queensland government. The capital investment will be used to develop state-of-the-art information systems and establish 46 child safety service centres around the state. The budget includes at least \$109 million across government for child protection reforms in 2004-05—that is the increase—rising to at least a \$214 million increase across government in 2006-07. There will be 518 additional front-line and support staff, 318 of those in the 2004-05 year, worth about \$11.7 million. The remaining 200 will be progressively employed over the next two years. The total expenditure over three years will be \$80.8 million, a very solid investment in staff. That is very much required.

Our recent national recruitment drive was enormously successful. We had 10,000 inquiries with 1,600 written applications for our child safety officer and child safety support officer positions. We are in the process of establishing 46 child safety service centres across the state to deliver front-line services. Indeed, that is where our priority is—in the front line ensuring that the most vulnerable children and youngsters in this state are given the best possible services.

The department is conducting a comprehensive series of staff training and development programs to acquit the CMC recommendations in relation to training ethos and culture at a cost of some \$3.6 million. One hundred and thirty-four new alternative care places will be provided this year. That is in response to the CMC report. We are running down that recommendation, and we now have 103 submissions from non-government services. That will be part of a \$58.4 million initiative to more than double the number of alternative care places to a state total of 680. This funding will greatly assist existing and prospective service providers deliver family based care for children with complex to extreme needs and non-family based care for children with moderate to extreme needs.

I am encouraging non-government organisations, which play an extraordinarily valuable role, to apply for a share of the funding. It will be announced today and advertised in this weekend's press, and this is in regard to the reunification of families where it is in the best interests of the child.

The budget recognises the critical importance of the value of foster carers in the child protection system. Carers have received a \$40 a fortnight increase. From 1 July we have another range of increases for foster carers. Can I put on the record once again the very valuable role that our foster carers right the way across Queensland do in the child protection system. They are valuable and they have great integrity in regard to the work that they do. We know that they do it through their own heart going out to vulnerable kids, and they deserve our applause and recognition. Foster carers in remote areas now receive from 1 July a 10 per cent loading in recognition of the extra costs of providing care in these localities, and carers who participate in training programs will be rewarded with additional loading as well.

Through integrated service delivery, 10 child safety directors will also be appointed across a range of departments in the near future to create a cross-agency network responsible for managing and implementing child safety services in Queensland. This is a groundbreaking effort on our part. The integrated client management system cost \$3.21 million.

Let me say in closing that the 2004-05 budget has aptly provided the new Department of Child Safety with the resources to get on with its No. 1 priority, and that is protecting the state's most vulnerable children and young people from abuse and neglect.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first round of questions will be from non-government members.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to the answer to non-government question on notice No. 2 in relation to the existing case loads for child safety officers. Minister, in light of the serious implications that arose from your predecessors being unable to answer the same question, I also note that recommendation No. 5.3 from the CMC report was that the department adopt an empirically rigorous means of calculating workloads. Minister, can you now tell the committee what the case loads currently are?

Mr REYNOLDS: Yes. In regard to staff workloads, I would indicate first of all that the CMC recommendation called for a rigorous analysis, and we have done that with Queensland Treasury. Indeed, our workload analysis tool has been internationally benchmarked. When you look at the number of cases for one particular officer, it was huge. It was up to 60 cases for an individual person working in indigenous areas in far-north Queensland. What I have said is that significant work has already been undertaken to reduce the case loads of child safety officers from 32 towards a case load of 15.

I recognise that you are asking me for a quantum there which I am saying we are working towards. We have done an amount of work in the last five months in putting together the Child Safety Implementation Unit, which has driven these case loads down. I want to say assuredly that they are heading down as quickly as they possibly can. There are many areas that we now need to reform to ensure that those case loads go down to 15.

Let me just say in an overall way that the model we are using is based on an internationally recognised workload analysis. That will be checked by the department and Queensland Treasury on a six-monthly basis to see whether we need more resources and staff, but the fact is that we have brought in more resources since February in terms of numbers of staff and we are getting through the backlog and notification as well. We have driven that backlog down by a great number, so there is still a backlog that is there.

There is the fact that we are training our staff and through professional development programs absolutely ensuring that we can even that workload out. Rather than spend the time looking at every office and the workload, what I am clearly indicating today is that we are driving it down and you can be assured that that will continue. I would say to you that over the next six months we will see that case load go down. We are driving it down, reducing the case load, and we are doing that in the very best possible way we can. Even when we go from 36 area offices to 46 child safety service centres, we are evening that workload out as well. We are decentralising that in a better way as well.

Mrs MENKENS: Similarly, Minister, I refer to question on notice No. 7 regarding the department's ability to track cases of statutory intervention. In your answer you state that the department has always had the capacity to track these cases. While that may be so, I remind you again of the findings of the CMC inquiry which concluded that record keeping deficiencies present obvious problems of accountability. Can you give this committee an assurance that the data problems that were a significant factor in matters like the Brooke Brennan and the 'Baby Kate' cases are no longer being encountered?

Mr REYNOLDS: I think the member for Burdekin and my shadow minister has read the blueprint and certainly the CMC recommendations. The question you are asking is: have we reformed the department on 14 July 2004? Well, the answer is that reform process is an ongoing matter, but I can say this to you: in terms of our client record system, we have had our staff out into area offices working extraordinarily hard, and what we need to do is implement the integrated client management system. We are working that over a three-year period. So in terms of working towards a standard of record keeping that we need to decrease the workload, to make our work as efficient and effective as we can, this is something that we need to continually work on.

The very fact that we have a \$44 million integrated client management system going into place over three years shows that is an ongoing task. I want to say that when you look at record keeping and look at every government, irrespective of the political persuasion of governments, it has been an absolute disgrace. It has been a disgrace under Labor governments and coalition governments. What we are doing now is giving ourselves the time to absolutely put the record management system in the very best way we can over the next three years.

Let me assure you that our area office administrative staff are being supported throughout the project through on-site assistance by File Force staff. They are the experts who are going into offices. Further support for area offices with high volumes of filing will be provided through the recruitment of seven dedicated record officers to be placed at Cairns, Thuringowa, Rockhampton, Gold Coast, Logan, Caboolture and Browns Plains area offices from early this month, initially on a temporary basis to judge the extent of ongoing need.

I really implore the opposition to see that we are not going to do the reforms overnight. That is not only naive—and I do not say that in a nasty way—but it is probably political chicanery as well. Let us get to the situation. The 110 reforms of the CMC are going to take time to deliver. We are ticking these off in the very best way that we can, and we are getting on with the job. I can assure you that my task is to get those CMC recommendations ticked off in an early and efficient way. I am here to protect the most vulnerable kids in society today.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the 'Recent Achievements' summary for Immediate Response Services, MPS page 12, regarding the introduction of the recent legislation, and to the department's involvement with deaths of children who have had previous contact with the department. Minister, isn't the number of deaths of children known to the department a measure of the failure of intervention or response services if their aim is the safety of children? Minister, how many children known to the department have died since the formation of the Department of Child Safety on 12 February 2004?

Mr REYNOLDS: Can I say, first of all, that it is a pity that the opposition are going down a track which is quite clearly against the bipartisan support that they had indicated they were going to give this government. Let me answer quite clearly—

Mr HORAN: How are they doing that?

Mr REYNOLDS: Let me answer quite clearly the question you have asked. The death of any child is a tragedy, and the Department of Child Safety takes very seriously the deaths of any children known to it. In the 2001 census year 562 children died in Queensland, or approximately 0.06 per cent of the population aged 17 years or less. In the last financial year, 2003-04, 0.1 per cent of children known to the department died from a range of causes. Given the complexity of the issues faced by families of at-risk children, it is sad—but not surprising—that a slightly higher percentage of children at risk died. If you look at it it is 0.06 per cent and 0.1 per cent.

In 2003-04, 36 children or young people known to the department have died. Only seven were in the department's care at the time of their death. Six died of natural causes and the cause of the remaining death is yet to be determined. Of the total 36 deaths, based on available information, only nine are not attributable to natural causes or accidents. These nine deaths represent less than 0.03 per cent of the total number of notifications handled within a year by my department.

Under the new legislation—it went through the parliament in June—every child death known to my department will be thoroughly investigated. Our system will be responsive to review findings to ensure that our practices and case work are of the very best standard. While most jurisdictions focus on deaths from abuse and neglect only—that is, the other jurisdictions across Australia—rigorous department reviews will be undertaken on all children known to the Department of Child Safety within the three years prior to their death, regardless of cause of death.

Let me be quite clear. In Australia, in terms of child death case reviews, we will have the best standard by far. My commitment to transparency and accountability is affirmed by the easy accessibility of child deaths data on the department's Information Gateway and our use of independent external reviewers. It is important that in Queensland we do not lose sight of the need for all parents to show diligent care in looking after their children. It is also important that the media, the opposition and the community do not prejudge the circumstances surrounding a child's death. I would not mind some extra time.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr REYNOLDS: The death of any child, of course, is distressing to the family, it is very distressing to my departmental staff—staff in your electorate as well—and to the broader community. To automatically assume that the death of a child known to the department relates to abuse and neglect is unjust and it is unhelpful, both to the family involved and to my departmental staff. In all fairness, we need to await the outcomes of the child death reviews before making final judgments in that case.

For example, in the past two months the department has been advised of the death of seven children who were known to the department. Six of these children died from natural causes, and the cause of the remaining death is yet to be determined. The Department of Child Safety will now move to review each of these cases, unlike other states and territories. However, I want to make it clear that the departmental review is about the appropriateness of departmental actions in relation to each child and whether there is effective interaction between my department and other key agencies. It is a nonsense to think that this is a benchmark that is being used against the department. That is how it is being portrayed by some sections of the media and, of course, by some sections of the parliament, namely the opposition. This is distinctly different to a police investigation or a coronial inquiry.

I am committed to ensuring that the child protection system continues to reform and improve, and does not repeat the mistakes of the past. In terms of the Child Death Case Review Committee, that will start its work by 1 August this year, as per the legislation. We are doing more than any other jurisdiction, but it should not be seen as a benchmark. I think it is pretty unjust to staff if it is seen that way.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the 'Strategic Issues' statement in the Departmental Overview of the MPS, page 1, and note that it is estimated that there are expected to be 35,000 notifications in the next 12 months. So that the committee can get an appreciation of the task in front of the department, what is the total case load of the Department of Child Safety?

Mr REYNOLDS: In terms of the department as a whole and in regard to the 35,000 cases, let me say, first of all, that it is an indictment on society and every community we live in when we see 35,000

notifications. It is indeed a pretty terrible indictment. I see it in my job as Minister for Child Safety every day. I look at a section of our community that I wish I was not looking at in terms of case files.

In regard to notifications, one thing that we can be very much aware of is that the notifications are going up. In many ways you would agree that that is a positive. People are actually reporting child abuse, or suspected child abuse, whether it be emotional, sexual or physical abuse or, indeed, neglect. I think the fact that we have had a CMC inquiry, we have had a blueprint and we have had a government that has been out there doing what we need to do has made people more aware. That has certainly led to the number of notifications we have as well.

Can I say that in terms of the number of reported cases of alleged child abuse or neglect within a year, as you can see it has gone from a target of 25,500 in 2002-03 to a total of 35,000. In regard to each of those 35,000 notifications which has come in, you go through an office in regard to the intake. Those 35,000 make up the intake that is going into the department. In terms of the assessment that is required, each of those then may filter down to a range of assessments as well. So the case load we have—both within the office in terms of substantiating or not substantiating child abuse—then relates further down to our family services officers who are out in the field working through cases as well. It filters down, of course, also to those who work within the Children's Court, who are taking cases as well. The 35,000 notifications is broken down in regard to the intake. The intake officers are dealing with those 35,000. We then go on to assessment and other areas as well.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the Output Performance for Early Intervention Services, MPS 7, and to the initiatives that assisted in establishing the distinction between early intervention services provided by this department and those that will be provided by the Department of Communities, and how these services can effectively be managed between the departments. Will you please explain to the committee just what the distinction will be and how the interaction will be managed?

Mr REYNOLDS: Yes. Is that MPS page 7?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes.

Mr REYNOLDS: That is a very important question, which the departments of Communities and Child Safety have done a great deal of work on. It is important to realise that we are looking at a continuum of services that are required at a state level in regard to child abuse generally. If we look at that continuum, which is going from prevention to early intervention to therapeutic treatment, what I would indicate to the committee is that the Department of Communities, by and large, will be the main provider of prevention and early intervention services. That is not to say that the Department of Child Safety may not be involved. The distinction, if you like, or the line in these things, is sometimes grey. If we look at family reunification for cases where there is a low level of neglect, we could probably define that as early intervention.

Primarily, when children or youngsters come into the statutory care and control of the Department of Child Safety, we would be mainly involved in therapeutic intervention. But it is also important to say that not only are the Department of Communities and the Department of Child Safety involved in prevention, early intervention or therapeutic treatment; we have a number of other departments involved as well. The Department of Health, the Department of Education, the Department of Disability Services, to name three, all have a role in their own areas as well.

The groundbreaking method that we are using in terms of an integrated service delivery really comes back to the fact that we have identified 10 state government departments which are involved in each aspect of those—if you are looking at a child and the child's development—so that we are able to integrate the effort. There will be a child safety director in each of those departments and they will be reporting to the director-general, who will sit on a DGs' committee as well. It really means that that across-government approach—looking at the case planning for a child, the integration of services—is really being done for the first time. Over and above that, we recognise that there are many tens of millions of dollars that go to non-government organisations, and those non-government organisations are involved in service delivery as well.

The integration between non-government organisations and government organisations is a key part of that service delivery. In terms not only of the Department of Communities but the other eight or nine state government departments and non-government organisations, we are really tracking for first time that continuum of services, and that will be done through case planning for children.

Mrs MENKENS: That was my next question. What role would those non-government organisations play in early intervention and therapeutic services?

Mr REYNOLDS: Can I go on to that? I have alluded to it. Can I say, first of all, that non-government organisations have a tremendously important role in the care and protection of children in terms of the work that they are doing right across Queensland. Our aim, of course, is to enhance the services that are offered to the non-government organisations as a clear partner in the service delivery in prevention, early intervention and therapeutic treatment.

Today I am announcing the family reunification package worth \$14 million over the next three years. That is part of our blueprint, part of what the CMC has actually recognised as well. As I have indicated, a major component of these services will be done by non-government organisations, and Health and other state government departments as well.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government questions has expired. I call the member for Redlands.

Mr ENGLISH: Issues of child protection are often a whole of government responsibility not just one for the Department of Child Safety and I think in your previous answer you actually indicated up to 10 government departments can be involved. In this new environment how are the various department ensuring communication and information is shared to ensure the best outcomes for vulnerable and at-risk children?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Redlands. I know the interest that he has in the child safety area in the electorate of Redlands. The Department of Child Safety's primary role is to ensure that all Queensland children who are at risk and in need of support if they are exposed to abuse, neglect or harm need to receive appropriate responses from Queensland's child protection system. That requires a coordinated response; not only from my department—we will be acting as the lead agency—but it also requires a response from other relevant government departments, non-government organisations and the valuable role that carers play as well.

The department is currently developing legislation for information sharing between relevant government agencies and non-government organisations. Can I say to you all that governments quite often work through the silos of departments. Might I say that we are working with departments in a very collaborative and cooperative way to ensure that information sharing across the departments can actually take place.

That legislation will enable the provision of information to relevant agencies where a coordinated response is required. The information sharing arrangement will be a ground-breaking reform and a fundamental aspect of the new child protection system being built in Queensland.

In addition, child safety director positions will be established, as I have indicated, in Queensland Police, Queensland Health, Education Queensland, Communities and Disability Services, Justice and Attorney-General, Corrective Services, DATSIP and Queensland Treasury. The child safety directors will promote their department's role in child protection service delivery; they will oversee, monitor and advise on the operational delivery and reporting of the department's service commitment to children at risk or subject to Department of Child Safety intervention; and it will include the coordination of those responsibilities with other agencies to provide a holistic and integrated child protection response from government. In terms of that sharing of information we want the directors of child safety to act as a change agent within the department that they are responsible to, to increase the awareness of child safety but also to increase the need to share information, and to have an integrated service delivery approach.

What we are doing in Queensland is going to be unique to the state. It will pass on to other service delivery—or indeed development in an integrated way—an example that we can be very, very proud of.

The Department of Child Safety has extensive external reporting arrangements in place. These include, of course, our annual report, the MPS we are doing today, the *Priority in Progress* report, *Child Protection Australia* by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the report on government services by the Productivity Commission, and our information gateway which provides a tremendous service to the community and the media. The departments also contribute some information to the Commission for Children and Young People and into the publication *Children and Young People in Queensland: A Snapshot Report*. So it is integrated service delivery in its very best form.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: I am sure all Queenslanders would agree that when dealing with issues of child protection the needs of the child should be paramount. I often hear you say that the new Department of Child Safety will be child focused. How will the new department reflect those sentiments while still ensuring families of children in the child protection system are involved in the process?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Woodridge. Being in the Woodridge area with you I know your passion for this area. It is very important to note that while I often remark that the new Department of Child Safety will be child focused, I am certainly not indicating that the parents will be less involved in their child's development. Being child focused relates to focusing on the safety, welfare and well-being of the child and where the rights or interests of a child and a parent conflict this means that the department will ensure that the welfare and best interests of the child are absolutely paramount. We cannot run a Department of Child Safety if we don't make children's interests paramount. But the parents, of course, have a major role to play and the most important role to play as the stakeholder.

Protecting our children is a responsibility we currently share with the Department of Communities and a range of other departments. We will take the lead role, of course, as I have indicated. The role of the Department of Communities, as I have already said, in terms of prevention and early intervention initiatives is about reducing the instance of child abuse in Queensland. The Minister for Communities,

Warren Pitt, sometimes indicates to me—he has indicated it in parliament—that he would like to do me out of a job. Prevention and early intervention in its purest form would not require my job. We know that is not likely to occur in the foreseeable future.

But let me say that the two key principles of the Child Protection Act are that families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, protection and development of their children and that the preferred way of ensuring a child's well-being is through the support of the child's family. Any actions taken by the department, while in the best interests of the child, must also seek to maintain family relationships.

Research tells us that recognising, maintaining and strengthening existing family connections is likely to result in a planned and supported return home for most children and young people in out-of-home care. That is our desired result. However, there will always be some children whose protective needs can only be met by a long-term alternative placement. We have done a lot of work in making sure that the act itself emphasises the need for participation by families, children and young people; especially hearing the voice of young people and making sure that their voice is a very important voice in the process.

A central requirement for the new Department of Child Safety will be the development of practice tools which are child focused to ensure that children and young people in care can participate in decisions. We will also be implementing strategies for strengthening the family's involvement and participation in decision-making and case planning.

What I am announcing today in terms of that \$14 million of services in family reunification goes a long way in that regard. Finally, as a preventative response, 40 specialist positions will be created within my department to work exclusively with parents whose children have been the subject of a low level notification and who continue to reside at home. The interests of the child will be paramount in the future and I am determined as minister that I will put the interests of the children of this state absolutely first.

The CHAIR: You may have already answered this question in relation to a response that you gave to the member for Burdekin, however I will ask it. The media has taken the new department to task a number of times when a serious incident or death occurs to a child known to the department. These are tragic situations and I know we all feel tremendously for the children involved and their families. Can you explain what investigations and processes are undertaken by the department in these circumstances?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to elaborate on some of the things that I indicated to the member for Burdekin a little while ago. It is very, very important to the family that is grieving, but also to the staff of our department who work so closely with these children, that we do this in a just and principled way when we are looking at a child death.

I have asked my department to give me an idea of the total number of children. In the 2001 census year, as I said, 562 died in Queensland or approximately 0.06 per cent of the population aged 17 years or less. The most comparable year that we then looked at was the last financial year, 2003-04, in which 0.1 per cent of children known to the department died from a range of causes. In fact, they are children under 18 years of age; the other figure related to children under 17. If we looked at 17 and 18-year-olds in terms of accidents in cars, our figures are pretty comparable to the population that is out there as well.

Given that this is a complex area it is sad but not surprising that a slightly high per cent of children at risk actually died. What we need to ensure that we do is have a rigorous process of investigating a child's death. I think where we go wrong at times is that we assume—and I think that was the assumption made in the question earlier—that if we have a number of deaths that that is a benchmark or an indicator. That is how the question was asked. It is not a benchmark or an indicator and sometimes it is seen by those who are not well aware of the work we are doing as a benchmark or indicator.

Let me say quite clearly that we are doing more than any other jurisdiction. We are investigating every child death that occurs when a child has been known to us—maybe just by a phone call—in the previous three years. As I indicated, out of the 36 deaths, based on our available information, only nine have not been attributable to natural causes or accidents. But we are not the police, we are not doing a police inquiry or a police investigation; we are not the coroner, we are not the coroner doing a coronial inquiry. Our death case review, which is leading Australia in a statutory way from 1 August, is really about making sure of the appropriateness of departmental actions in relation to each child and whether there was effective interaction between my department and other key agencies. That is what we are looking at: that integrated approach. It is succinctly different to a police investigation or a coronial inquiry and I am asking the media and all of the members of parliament that we have here in this committee to understand the rationale of that.

Mr FRASER: Over recent months Peter Forster and The Consultancy Bureau have been employed by the government to develop and implement the blueprint for reforms for the child protection system in Queensland. Can you outline the costs of employing Mr Forster and The Consultancy Bureau and also outline the benefits to the formation of the Department for Child Safety?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to thank the member for Mount Coot-tha who has, of course, many different services in his electorate that relate to child safety and I am sure that he is very much aware of the services that are there. I want to reaffirm to all members of the committee here today that the Beattie government is determined to reform the child protection system in Queensland. This is one of our highest priorities.

To do this it is essential to have the most competent and committed people available to lead the process. Indeed, can I say to the committee today that I make no apologies for seeking out the best and most qualified people to join our team as we implement the most far-reaching reform of child protection in the history of Queensland.

While Peter Forster has been a key part of the team we have assembled, we have also brought on board some of the best people from right across the government. That is why I have appointed Robin Sullivan as DG and in Norelle Deeth as deputy DG. We are seeking out the best people we can have. In addition, we have excellent people who have joined our team from agencies such as Queensland Transport, Queensland Police and the Department of Emergency Services to ensure that we have the expertise required to ensure that the CMC report and blueprint are implemented fully and in a timely manner. We have also, of course, used the resources of the Premier and Treasurer.

Make no mistake here, these reforms are about protecting Queensland's most vulnerable children and I will continue as minister to bring in whoever is required to get the job done. We are looking at the most vulnerable kids in society today. As a Labor government we are absolutely determined that we do that in the very best possible way.

In response to the CMC inquiry on the abuse of children in foster care, the Premier engaged The Consultancy Bureau led by Peter Forster to commence work on 6 January this year. He and his organisation, his team of people who were involved, were the most suitable and qualified team to take on this major process and the work has been vital to the implementation of the blueprint to date. The Consultancy Bureau was contracted first of all to deliver two phases of the reform process. The first was the development of a project plan to deliver recommendations, the second was the development of the blueprint for implementing the recommendations to the CMC inquiry.

We have continued to use the services of Peter Forster since delivery of the blueprint. He has been contracted by my department to deliver phase three. In April the Premier outlined in parliament that The Consultancy Bureau's services had been secured for phase 3 at a cost of \$158,400. My department has also taken up an option for some additional culture change workshops. They have been amazingly successful and very important. This brings the total cost for phase 3 to \$198,400. This work includes the design and implementation of statewide transition workshops to every staff member, change facilitators, and training and the design of organisation structures.

I complete my answer by saying that the work of The Consultancy Bureau has been vital in driving staff commitment to the child focus culture of the new department. This is a sound investment in the future of the child protection system in Queensland and it is essential to ensure that the safety and well-being of the state's most vulnerable children are paramount.

Mr ENGLISH: One of the principal complaints during the recent CMC inquiry was that staff had not been adequately trained to actually fulfil some of the roles that they were expected to undertake. How are you ensuring that staff in the new Department of Child Safety receive proper training and what steps are you going to implement to ensure that training is consistent across the state?

Mr REYNOLDS: I welcome the committee's interest in this question because it is pivotal to the reforms that we are bringing in. The department's new initiatives ensure that our staff are inducted in a timely manner and provided with relevant, consistent and high-quality professional practice training. What we have done from February and will continue to do for the next three years is in stark contrast to the support that has been offered to our staff in the past. I put that on the record.

I am absolutely determined to ensure that the staff of the new Department of Child Safety have the best possible training and development available. We have committed \$10 million over three years to training alone in a bid to provide our staff with the skills they require to service the needs of children in care across the state. \$3.6 million is being spent this year on a comprehensive series of staff training and development programs to ensure that we have the capacity to implement the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission report.

The staff who are transitioning over the next month or two to the Department of Child Safety need to be willing to work in a new culture and under a new ethos. That is an important part of the work that we have been doing. We have had the major recruitment of 318 staff. That will certainly drive down the case load. Each one of these newly appointed officers is required to attend an eight-week professional development program. This is starkly different to what happened when we put on new staff members in the past. We then put them on at the front line. They will undertake a two-month professional development program. Every new child safety officer will have a 12-month probation period during which a full skills and performance assessment will take place on the job. I see that as a positive for the department and for our vulnerable children. Going through that performance assessment and working

through where their skills are lacking and how we can professionally develop those is a positive for the staff members themselves.

They will also work in a non-government community-based organisation to improve their understanding of the child protection landscape. We are getting rid of that divide between government and non-government organisations. In many ways I want to train these people together to ensure that we see integrated service delivery. Ninety of our current staff have graduated from the first program and 20 new staff are now completing their block of training. More training programs are scheduled for the rest of the year. I am pleased to confirm that this is an ongoing commitment to giving new workers who join the department the skills they need to help children and families in crisis regardless of what part of the state they are working in.

Within 12 months an assessment and training program will be mandatory for all existing tenure child safety officers and temporary caseworkers. We have been negotiating with universities and TAFE institutions. Over the next six months the department will implement partnership agreements with universities to deliver undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum specific to statutory child protection work. I am very proud of the work that the staff have been doing in that regard. I look forward to seeing those programs come on board in 2005 at universities and TAFE.

The CHAIR: The Beattie government's recent budget delivers the largest investment in child protection ever made by a Queensland government. Apart from this huge investment we are all aware that a significant amount of work was required to reform the culture of the former Department of Families. What is being done to ensure that there is a positive change in the department's culture and ethos to meet the needs of the state's most vulnerable children?

Mr REYNOLDS: Changing the culture of an organisation is something that cannot be done from the top down alone. It is an essential part of defining the organisation's purpose and goals and it requires the input of all staff members—taking them with us. Over the past five months of reforms the former Department of Families staff have been through vigorous transition processes, which I have indicated, which include addressing the new culture and ethos expected within the new Department of Child Safety. Many of those workshops in the regions have been completed. Central staff are due to complete workshops later this month. Change facilitators are also in place within the department. These have been chosen from an area office to provide support and guidance for staff throughout the transition process.

A central requirement for the new Department of Child Safety will be the development of practice tools which are child focused to ensure that children and young people in care can participate in decisions. Being child focused means we will focus on the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child in all of our decision making. Before this change can be implemented it has been essential to look at the strategic focus of the new department involving organisations like Create. Ensuring young people have their say is a very important component of this as well.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: I refer to paragraph two of the answer to my question on notice No. 8. On behalf of the people of Maryborough, I would like to thank you for the additional resources for the Maryborough office. You have noted that 11.5 additional positions have been created within the Maryborough office. At paragraph five you talk about the Maryborough staffing resources increasing from 16.5 to 36.5 full-time employees, which is an increase of 20. Could you enlighten me on the anomaly between 11.5 and 20?

Mr REYNOLDS: It is a pretty easy thing to enlighten you on. I know the interest that the member for Maryborough has had in the area of child safety. Your office is active in that regard. I congratulate you in that regard. In the answer we have said that 11.5 additional positions have been created within the Maryborough office. In the fifth paragraph we actually talk about FTEs—full-time equivalents. We are talking about full-time, part-time and temporary staff. There is not an anomaly because in the second paragraph we are actually talking about additional positions.

As minister, I have seen the Maryborough office significantly under pressure. It is one that we have probably worked on more than just about any other office in the state. The increase in staff this year and the next two years will be 518. In terms of our audit of the office in terms of staffing, we are looking at increasing from 16 FTEs to 36.5 FTEs, including relief staff, under the child reform blueprint prepared by the Peter Forster.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: So that increase is in full-time employees?

Mr REYNOLDS: Yes, it is. It will from 16 full-time equivalents to 36.5 full-time equivalents. I have been informed 11.5 staff are already there. What we are working towards over the next three years is eventually a staff of 36.5 FTEs. The Maryborough office is going to do very well in terms of increased employment in the region. But, most particularly, we recognise the number of notifications and the case load of our people there. These staff are being put on board and we are decreasing that case load, but there is a range of criteria that decrease case load, including the practice tool that I have talked about before, and an increase in staff. It also includes the ability to induct staff properly—that is, having that

two-month period. As I indicated in a question before, in the next 12 months it will be mandatory for all of our staff to go through that training.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: As a follow-up, you have indicated on page two of that answer that in the financial year 2004-05 you are looking at an increase of 318 staff rising to 518 over the next three years. You have already answered in a question from the member for Mount Coot-tha that there is a range of staff. Administration people are probably not as critical—because those skills are transferable—as frontline staff. Are the frontline staff still to be trained or are you willing to jeopardise your place on the Christmas card list of other states by recruiting experienced staff to Queensland?

Mr REYNOLDS: I am very willing to reduce the number of Christmas cards that I get from my colleagues in other states. I make that point most assuredly. Our nationwide campaign resulted in 10,000 inquiries. We had international inquiries as well. Out of those 10,000 inquiries we were able to get 1,600 applications, 600 of those for child safety officers who require a degree—we accept a range of degrees—and about 1,000 for the paraprofessional positions, the child safety support officers. The interest has been pretty strong.

A number of those have been from interstate. One thing that the interstate staff can see is that system that we will have after three years of reform will be unique for Australia. It will be unique probably for the world. We are taking the best elements of the systems of three states—New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia—and the best elements from New Zealand, Canada and Great Britain to get an integrated service delivery system.

What we are seeing is people wanting to come into Queensland to work in these child safety positions. Over and above that, we are also seeing some of our staff who were burnt out, exhausted, browned off with being in old Department of Families willing to look at a new culture and new ethos and come back and work for us. That is a very good light at the end of tunnel.

I want to put the best possible staff on. I know my director-general wants to put on the best possible staff. I can assure you that the recruitment and retention of staff is a critical element of this. To retain staff you have to support them in a much better way than we have in the past. That is why we have seconded from the Department of Emergency Services Paula Scully who ran the Priority 1 program to support ambulance officers. We have seconded Paula for six months to show us how to run an internal program in that regard. We want to look after the very good staff we recruit whether they are living in the remote sections of Queensland—in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—or in Brisbane or Maryborough. Let us support the staff in the very best way we can. That is what we will be doing. I do not care about the Christmas cards.

Mrs MENKENS: At dot point six on page 17 of MPS it refers to improving the cost reimbursement to foster carers. Currently grandparents who become carers of their own grandchildren are not reimbursed at the same level as foster carers. This is causing severe hardship in many situations. In view of your announcement about funding of family unification, I ask: is your department considering changing this situation?

Mr REYNOLDS: That is a good question. We are very much aware that in regard to the support that grandparents need, the state government and also the federal government have a critical role to play. I am very pleased to say that the Premier has led on this issue across Australia. I commend both the Premier and Prime Minister John Howard for the work that they did at the COAG meeting about a week and a half ago. There has been a commitment made at a federal and state level to work together in terms of recognising that grandparents out there do a huge amount of work in regard to children in care but also children who are not in care. In terms of the Department of Child Safety our work is really about supporting children who are in the care and protection of the state.

We have extended the foster care allowance as part of our reforms to relative carers. That is for children who are in our care and protection are now recognised as a carer and in terms of the type of support that we give other carers. That is a very important part of the reform process that has been achieved over the last five months. But then we go to the grandparents who are looking after kids who are not in formal care. That is what has been impressed on the Prime Minister by the states and territories at the COAG meeting just about a week and a half ago. The Prime Minister has agreed—Larry Anthony, the responsible minister, has also agreed—to take that on board. We are now working collaboratively and cooperatively with the federal government which has expressed an interest in looking after the grandparents who have children in their care and who are not being given the family income support that they require. In that regard, we have a ministerial council meeting on 28 July in Hobart. What the Premier has raised with regard to grandparenting as an issue is being discussed at that meeting on 28 July in Hobart as well.

Outcomes of future Commonwealth, state and territory negotiations will be considered with respect to future policy directions regarding supports made available to grandparents responsible for raising their grandchildren on a formal basis. Let me say quite clearly: the state has acted to bring in the relative carers, including grandparents, and to award them the same type of caring benefits if the child is in the care and protection of the state. We now want to see the federal government play its role from a family income supplement perspective, and we believe it is heading down that track.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 11 relating to 'Immediate Response Services'. A problem I have heard regularly is that when a crisis occurred involving children after hours or on weekends it is often impossible to obtain support from the Department of Families. Will Child Safety officers be available on call on weekends or after hours, because there is a long time between 5 p.m. Friday to 9 a.m. Monday?

Mr REYNOLDS: That is an important question. It is an important question particularly for regional Queensland, where you and I represent electorates. Crisis Care of course does a very valuable job in terms of the need to act and react to a crisis. If we have a notification that a child has been abused or neglected, Crisis Care reacts very quickly in that regard. Crisis Care is an organisation on the ground mainly in the metropolitan and fringe metropolitan areas. But I also say that each of our area managers—each of those 36 area managers—also acts and reacts as the agent of Crisis Care. Basically, that is quite often a collaborative reaction as well or action with the police, with health and with other areas as well.

Crisis Care is a statewide coverage, but Crisis Care then alerts the area managers in each of the offices to act and react to a particular crisis. It also has important links, as I have said, with police and health and carers, and the staff are currently on call throughout the state on a 24-hour a day, seven-day a week basis. In accordance with the blueprint, one thing that I want to emphasise today is that new hours of work arrangements are being negotiated with the Queensland Public Sector Union and will be in place we hope by early 2005. The old days of the Department of Families finishing at 5 o'clock formally we hope will be over by the early part of 2005, and we are looking at rostering on staff from 6 p.m. If you like, we are looking at having core hours from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. for people to work and then having people on a roster until 10 p.m. at night and then people being on call from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. the next day.

If we are looking after our most vulnerable children in Queensland, we should not be operating as a 9 to 5 or 8 to 6 operation. We are about being alerted and reacting to those children in that way. So there will be more flexible working hours for our team leaders and our Child Safety officers to allow for the response to clients that you quite correctly state is needed. This is not something we do just within working hours.

Mrs MENKENS: Good. Minister, I refer to the increases in payment for foster carers and the community awareness program for foster carer recruitment, which is dealt with in the MPS at page 3, and ask: are you aware of situations where previous carers claim to have private expenditure incurred on behalf of the Department of Families which has been unpaid for an extended time? What is the present situation with the external review that is being undertaken in relation to these claims?

Mr REYNOLDS: I think one area that was very much recognised by the CMC was the fact that foster carers are not reimbursed or have not been reimbursed to the extent that they should have been in the past. That is why the government, as soon as we got the report on 6 January—in fact, we acted proactively—went about absolutely ensuring that from 1 January this year we increased the amount of money that went to foster carers by \$40 a fortnight. There is a myth out there that is quite often perpetuated that foster carers are actually on a salary. Most foster carers out there do their very best by the child that they have in care. We recognise—as would most of us sitting around these tables today—that bringing up kids is not cheap. Bringing up kids and looking after their wellbeing, their safety, their health, their schooling and so on is an expensive proposition for all of us, and it is for foster carers as well. That is why we have been so keen to not only have that early payment but also work towards other payments as well.

As from 1 July—that is, 13 days ago—we announced a range of different payments, because we do recognise, as you say, the claims that have been made by foster carers that they have not been adequately reimbursed. Some of them whom I have talked to say that they have not been adequately reimbursed for 25 years. So it has been an ongoing claim that has been made by foster carers, and we want to make sure that we remedy their situation. That is why we have had a further \$20 per fortnight increase in the fostering allowance rate for carers of children from zero to one years from 1 July, increased the rates of common secondary payments and increased one-off establishment payments from \$200 to \$375. The start-up allowance has increased from \$50 to \$60. The high support needs allowance has increased from \$60 to \$72 per week. There is also a further \$245 for the introduction of a regional remote loading payment for carers living in the far north and west of the state.

I should just share with the committee that there is a typo here and I nearly said \$245,000, but I should say \$245. I am being advised by the Director of Child Protection that that is the total amount being allowed—that is, a further \$245,000 for the introduction of the remote loading payment for carers. That is a pretty important one for those who are living in the far north and west of the state. There will also be indexation of foster allowances in January 2005. That is an important category as well. We have not in the past been indexing this. Just to answer that last question quickly, the department is engaging in a project with the key stakeholders to assess the true cost of caring for children in Queensland. The outcomes of this project will inform how we financially support carers in the future. I will ensure that I tell the shadow minister of that at the time it comes out.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to the comment in the 'Departmental Overview' providing an historical perspective to the problem of child abuse. In Queensland much of the institutional abuse was identified by the Forde inquiry. You are aware of the reparation fund established to recompense indigenous workers who have a claim for unpaid wages. Why is it that there is no similar scheme for wards of the state who claim that they also have unpaid wages?

Mr REYNOLDS: First of all, the matter of unpaid wages would be a whole-of-government decision, not an issue for myself as the Minister for Child Safety. That is a whole-of-government decision which cabinet would actually examine. In terms of the Forde inquiry, when the former minister, Anna Bligh, asked former Governor Leneen Forde to go about that inquiry, again we led Australia. We were the only state willing to go back into the murky and ugly history of the past. I have to say to you that when I attended a function some weeks ago at Parliament House for people who had been affected by living in institutions I actually shared with them their grief for the past. The people who have grieved and still grieve have certainly been part of our consideration as well. The Forde inquiry recommendations have been put in place with a number of organisations such as the Esther Centre and the Historical Abuse Network being funded. With regard to the charter for redress that has been given to me, I am meeting with those organisations next week. I am very keen to work with them through the problems they have.

The CHAIR: The time for questions from non-governments has expired.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, Aboriginal and Islander child care agencies play an essential role in the support and care of indigenous children in families at risk. The blueprint outlined recommendations to better resource these agencies and increase the service profile. What steps is the department taking to ensure those groups continue to receive the support they need to carry out their important work?

Mr REYNOLDS: I say to the member for Woodridge that that is a key question in these reforms. There is no other major area that has needed reform more than the chronic degree of child abuse or neglect that is occurring within our indigenous communities. We certainly know that the communities themselves and Aboriginal and Islander people generally in Queensland are overrepresented in our child protection statistics. Indeed, 24 per cent of children in the care and protection of the state are indigenous. That is a sorry statement of the past in terms of indigenous people. If we look at areas in north Queensland, it is up to 50 per cent, which is a major overrepresentation. In the gulf and the cape, it goes up to 60 per cent in terms of the number of children in care.

Since I have been appointed as minister, I have particularly focused on the support and attention given to indigenous communities across Queensland. My electorate reflects one of the highest concentrations of indigenous people as a proportion of population of any electorate. It includes Palm Island, which makes me very aware of the prevailing issues. We have committed ourselves to establishing or enhancing 23 Aboriginal and Islander child-care agencies, AICCAs as we know them. I have actively engaged these agencies given their crucial role such as family support, placement services, carer support and statutory advice.

I put on the record today that many of the AICCAs have been overloaded and have been underfunded. They also in some cases have not had the capacity to work through the many issues that are facing them with that sort of overrepresentation. We want to be involved with them in capacity building those organisations to ensure that they can work in the very best possible way for the very vulnerable indigenous children of Queensland. That is why we have made a financial injection of \$4.7 million this financial year to do that work. That is being doubled to \$9.4 million in the next financial year. We are also establishing a peak body for AICCAs to set strategic direction, develop statewide frameworks and advocate on behalf of the AICCAs as well.

There is a lot of work that we have done already with regard to supporting indigenous families and indigenous children. An indigenous alternative care officer was appointed to the far north to recruit, train and support relative and foster carers in the Cape York communities. We have also put in 15 new positions for indigenous staff in the former Department of Families to provide families with culturally appropriate family support responses and to strengthen knowledge, skills and resources to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children. But central to our strategy will be improved resourcing and support for the AICCAs as demonstrated by the recruitment of a principal project officer to progress the AICCA model development over the next number of months.

Mr FRASER: The Gwenn Murray audit report was instrumental in determining some of the underlying problems in the foster care system in Queensland. I understand that a further two phases of a foster care audit are under way. Can you outline to the committee what these audits hope to address?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to thank the member for Mount Coot-tha for that important question. At the outset, can I state that, as I have indicated, foster-carers provide an absolutely invaluable role in Queensland. Their greatest achievement is that they are caring and selfless people. We value the work that has been performed by our carers and we are committed to supporting them. Nevertheless, the improved practice and accountability standards in the new child protection system that I am building will be focused exclusively on the needs of children at risk from harm, neglect and abuse. That is the

fundamental principle of the new child protection system that has been envisaged by the CMC in its January report.

The Beattie government is determined that children suffering abuse or who are at risk of abuse and cannot live at home receive the highest level of care. To achieve this, it is vital that we have mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of care that children receive. The foster care audit is an absolutely essential and rigorous component of that monitoring system. Late last year Gwenn Murray was contracted to lead phase 1 of the foster care audit, which involved the auditing of notifications of foster-carers who had current placements as at 20 June last year. To ensure that all foster-carers in Queensland who have been the subject of a notification for a child placed in their care were audited an internal departmental process was implemented to lead phases 2 and 3 of the audit. Phases 2 and 3 commenced in February this year and involve auditing notifications of assessments of foster-carers who did not have a placement at the commencement of phase 1 of the audit or who had not been audited as part of phase 1.

The purpose of the final two phases of the foster care audit is to determine the accuracy and appropriateness of the assessment outcome for each foster-carer notification and corresponding initial assessment that was outside the scope of phase 1 of the foster care audit. As part of this process, any matters relating to the actions—or inactions—of departmental officers that may require a further response will be brought to the attention of the director-general. Phases 2 and 3 of the foster care audit will be completed by August this year.

Analysis of the findings for this audit will identify emerging themes and trends of practice that will subsequently allow for strategies to be implemented to address these at both a practice and systemic level. This includes recommendations for improved practice and accountability standards with a particular focus on the needs of the child. As we enter this new era in child protection, we will be constantly learning from the past. I welcome the results of these audits and I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with our foster-carers for the benefit of Queensland's children. Both of these phases of the audits will be a real learning base for the department. We want to make sure that foster-carers who are out there are doing the job in the very best possible way they can.

Mr ENGLISH: The Crime and Misconduct Commission report highlighted dysfunctional reporting standards in the former Families Department. Can you explain what the new department is going to do to address this?

Mr REYNOLDS: Yes. Thank you very much. First of all can I say that the question that the member for Redlands is asking is a very, very important one. I have alluded to it today and I would like to give some greater emphasis to it. I am pleased to advise that the information renewal initiative is well under way. This initiative will deliver a significant redevelopment of our information technology environment, including key client systems and record keeping, and radically improve the department's ability to reliably report on child safety related matters. In line with the CMC's recommendations, the information renewal initiative will end the severe limitations of the current system in five closely related areas, these being information architecture, infrastructure, client systems, data capture, analysis and reporting, and record-keeping processes in service delivery centres. The information renewal initiative is an investment of \$44 million—and as I indicated to the member for Burdekin that is over a three-year period—to create a modern, flexible information technology framework to enable the Department of Child Safety to better report against children and young persons on child protection matters.

The centrepiece of the information renewal initiative is the integrated client management system—or ICMS—which will provide improved and more accessible, accurate and complete information on children and young persons allowing more effective case management and case planning by departmental officers. Information exchange between departments and with the Commissioner for Children and Young People will also be enhanced through the ICMS. An evaluation and tenders for systems is progressing and the new child protection functionality to replace the current child protection information system will get under way this financial year.

Work has also begun on the development of a new data warehouse which, combined with a flexible enterprise reporting tool, will greatly enhance information accessibility and significantly improve upon current analytical and predictive capability as well. The data warehouse facility will collect child safety information from relevant systems inside the new department as well as some external systems. It will provide automated reporting thereby efficiently distributing appropriate information to departmental officers and external parties who have a legitimate requirement to access it. This initiative will also provide powerful analysis tools to aid the implementation of an effective performance management framework. Significant attention is also being given to record-keeping practices to enhance the quality of information going into corporate systems. The purpose of this project is to attend to specific records management activities, including the location of attached or single-client documents and the attachment of these to relevant client files.

So I am happy to say that our information renewal initiative is one of the most progressive in the country and that it will bring major benefits to the reforms to the child protection system in Queensland. There is a time span that we need to do that over, but it will bring major benefits

The CHAIR: Consistent and structured decision making was an area of concern highlighted by both the CMC report and the blueprint for reform of the child protection system. Can you tell me about the new practice standards and decision-making tools being developed by the implementation unit in your department?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to thank the chairperson for that question. First of all, can I say that the department is committed to progressing the recommendations from the CMC inquiry. The blueprint for implementing the CMC report recommendations outline clearly the need to ensure child focused and accountable service delivery. To do this, a number of projects have been established simultaneously to progress these recommendations and to establish high practice standards for the Department of Child Safety. I am pleased to announce that I recently approved the purchase of child protection decision support tools in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the CMC report and the blueprint. The structured decision-making system, available through the children's research centre, offers a suite of tools that will help regulate, standardise and record the front-line decisions taken by child safety officers.

This is an exciting time for child protection in Queensland and this particular decision clearly reflects this department's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the CMC report and the blueprint. I am pleased to also say that this decision was made after careful consideration to ensure that the best available tools are purchased. This is child protection practice within the unique Queensland context.

The decision to purchase the structured decision-making system was based on the outcomes of an evidence based review of available data on child protection decision support tools undertaken by an identified expert in the area. We will ensure that these tools will support staff through the introduction of a consistent methodology for risk assessment and decision making and provide the organisation with information in relation to workload and resource allocation. The introduction of these tools will be supported by a strong implementation plan, which will include the development of resource materials and face-to-face training as well.

In addition to the work that has been undertaken in relation to a decision-making system, a project team, including experienced practitioners, has been established to develop a practice manual. This manual will set the practice standards across the state and will be developed in consultation with our key stakeholders. In fact, that practice manual has been a document that we have been using in its draft form in many of the sessions that we have had with staff across the state. We have involved external stakeholders including our field staff, representatives from PeakCare and statewide consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff as well. I am extremely happy with the progress of this important area and I look forward to seeing the results of further detailed work in relation to practice and procedures, which will be progressively implemented with the staff this year.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, the government has provided more than \$400,000 to assist a group called Family Focus provide valuable in-home and centre based therapeutic intervention services for families in Woodridge. What other kinds of intervention and therapeutic programs does the government fund in Queensland?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Woodridge. I compliment her on the work that she has done with organisations like Family Focus in the electorate of Woodridge. They are a key part of the non-government support that we are getting, of course, and funding as well. In terms of intervention and therapeutic services, this was a key component of the CMC inquiry. What we have done subsequent to that inquiry and the blueprint is provide a substantial injection of funding for therapeutic services for children, young people and their families. I am aware that therapeutic support is a vital component of the care system. It is essential to help Queensland's most vulnerable children and most vulnerable families. In particular, it is critical for children with complex and/or extreme needs and those who may have physical disabilities or severe behavioural issues as well.

The Department of Child Safety currently provides funding of some \$9.3 million to various interventions, therapeutic and assessment support services in 37 locations across Queensland. Indeed, the service types funded range across sexual abuse counselling and intensive family support. In addition to the Family Focus service in Woodridge, which is currently funded by about \$409,725, another significant service provider is the Abused Child Trust, which is based in Brisbane and Townsville, and which receives a grant of over \$661,000. The Churches of Christ pathways assessment and intervention services in Maryborough, Mackay-Whitsunday and on the Gold Coast receives a total of \$632,000 per annum. The new families program, managed by Mercy Families, which is based on the north side of Brisbane, is funded at \$566,000 per annum. The Receiving, Assessment Placement and Therapy program—RAPT—managed by Lifeline Community Care, is funded by some \$408,000. The Sunshine-Cooloola sexual abuse prevention intervention program, which is operated by the Sunshine Coast Women's Crisis Service, receives about \$414,000. Bravehearts, a counselling and advocacy service for children, adolescents and survivors of child sexual assault, has received \$106,000 in non-recurrent funding as well. That illustrates that we see therapeutic services as being extraordinarily important—those physical therapeutic needs, for example, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and

speech therapy, but also those which address the psycho-social needs of the child, young person, family or carer. The latter type of therapeutic response seeks to, of course, ameliorate the effects of harm experienced by the child or young person and will include behaviour management therapeutic services.

I am also pleased to advise that the government has provided \$320,000 this financial year, going up to \$800,000 in 2006-07, to establish an enhanced sexual abuse counselling service for children and young people as well as many millions being devoted to Queensland Health and Disability Services for services that they will be providing on our behalf.

Mr FRASER: I would like to return to a matter touched on by the member for Maryborough. It is clear that to carry out the 110 recommendations of the CMC report, additional staff will be required. Can you outline to the committee how you will go about recruiting and selecting these new staff and how many new staff you hope to attract?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to thank the member for Mount Coot-tha for that very important question. Again, this goes to the heart of resourcing the Department of Child Safety. I am pleased to be able to advise that the department has substantially increased the number of staff over the last 12 months with a particular focus on increasing the number of service delivery staff on the front line. As the committee is no doubt aware, the former Department of Families increased its service delivery staffing capacity each year over the last five years. Additional positions in the 2003-04 year have included those funded in the previous year under the Future Directions initiative, which amounted to some 92 full-time equivalent positions as well as the creation of an additional 79 positions in August/September last year.

The department has also acted very quickly in accordance with the intent of the blueprint to fast-track the appointment of at least 66 full-time equivalent additional service delivery staff to ensure that improvements in service to children were implemented between March and June this year.

The committee will also be aware of the significant increase in staffing to the department as part of the Beattie government's commitment to the child protection reform blueprint. When talking about the 518 new staff, we often concentrate on the 280 child safety officers right on the front line, including 40 that will be new specialist staff to work exclusively with parents whose children have been the subject of a low-level notification and continue to reside at home. There are other people very much working on the front line—33 court officers, paraprofessionals that we will have in the system; 49 team leaders and 19 senior practitioners, which will enable there to be one senior practitioner at each of the 46 child safety service centres; at least 48 child safety support officers; and 70 administrative officers. They have a major role to play in backing up our child safety officers and child safety support officers. Quite often they have been left to do the administrative work because of the lack of support that has been given there. As I indicated earlier, our campaign has been extraordinarily successful. We will continue to work through further campaigns as the year goes on. I think the new staff coming on board will certainly enhance the work that we are doing.

The CHAIR: The time for government members' questions has expired. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the 2004-05 highlights, on page 2 of the MPS, and to page 101 of the blueprint showing the proposed DCS zonal structure of child safety service centres. It is being put to me that rural areas outside the main centres are currently not being serviced adequately. What measures will be put in place to address this? Using as an example a community such as the Burdekin area of Ayr and Home Hill, would a part-time office be set up to service, say, two days a week rather than have the cost in travel of officers travelling down on an ad hoc basis?

Mr REYNOLDS: As a regional minister, I would like to indicate that I will be doing all I possibly can to ensure regional Queensland does very well out of these reforms. So will, of course, Brisbane and the fringe metropolitan and regional areas in the south-east corner. I want to make sure that rural and remote communities, which have suffered in the past from a lack of service delivery, are able to respond in a much better way.

We will have more child safety service centres in the area you are talking about. We are increasing the number of officers in Townsville-Thuringowa by one. We presently have one in Townsville and one in Thuringowa. So we are increasing the staff there, given the huge population base that we have in Townsville.

In relation to the Burdekin, there is certainly a possibility that outreach services could be placed in the Burdekin. They will be built upon the needs of the community. We will be assessing the needs of the community. The next phase of planning is with the staff and the communities involved. We had regions in the past. We have got rid of the 11 regions. We have now come down to the seven zones. The whole idea of this is to increase the area offices from 36 to 46 child safety service centres. We are actually decentralising as much as we possibly can.

I want to make sure that we are very much aware that child protection services will continue to be provided by officers of the Department of Child Safety in rural and remote areas. Certainly in the awareness and transition workshops we have been conducting for staff we are involving people from

across Queensland. We are very aware of the need to give staff incentives to allow them to work in the rural and remote areas. That is one of the greatest concerns we have. We want to get new staff into some of the Aboriginal and Islander communities in terms of the cluster model we are implementing across far-northern Queensland. We are wanting to get people into areas such as Palm Island, Mornington Island, Cooktown and Thursday Island. There is an emphasis on rural and remote communities. We will certainly be assessing those needs as time goes on.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the highlights for 2004-05 on MPS page 2 and in particular to the statement that one of the outcomes of the new system is improved accountability and community perceptions. As you are aware, one of the major concerns identified by the CMC was the culture of the previous department. Would you please explain what the process is to be if a parent is not happy with a decision taken by a departmental officer? What review process is available in such a case?

Mr REYNOLDS: That is a very important question. I share with my shadow spokesman the concern for proper monitoring and proper external processes that do allow the department to be put under scrutiny. I say to the estimates committee today that I as minister will do all I possibly can to ensure that the Department of Child Safety is open, transparent and accountable. In the five months I have been minister I think I have already shown that that pathway is the one we will continue to go down.

In terms of the key external stakeholders who will be involved in this process, it is important to say that we have the Commission for Children and Young People. Very important work went into the legislation that went through parliament in May and June to ensure greater accountability by the commission. First we set up the Child Guardian position that will be taken on by the commissioner, with an extra position of assistant commissioner made available. Monitoring by the Child Guardian would be the extra monitoring process that would take place. With regard to the commission, we have seen the extra millions of dollars that have gone to the Commission for Children and Young People with regard to visitations to children in care that will take place. I believe that some 70 new staff are being put on by the Commission for Children and Young People in that regard.

Most importantly, though, the department is very committed to hearing and responding to complaints from clients. A departmental project team is responding to the CMC's inquiry's criticism of the previous department's complaints management system. A centrally staffed 1800 complaints hotline has been established. New clients and their families and friends can speak with an impartial person about their concerns. An email address can also be accessed from the Department of Communities' web site.

In terms of our openness and accountability, an information gateway has been established on the web. That will be showing, for example, the child death case reviews taking place. Over and above that, we have established, in a statutory way, a new Child Death Case Review Committee. That will be chaired by the Commissioner for Children and Young People. We are doing all we possibly can to ensure the department is as open, accountable and transparent as it can be.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the quality measure for early intervention services, referred to on page 9 of the MPS, which indicates that the actual percentage of renotification last year was 37 per cent. How does this figure compare with similar measures in other states?

Mr REYNOLDS: As I have indicated, much of this work will be done by the Department of Communities. The Department of Child Safety will still be involved. For example, as I have indicated, early intervention may well be when we have a child that has been put on a low-level notification and we then bring in the family reunification. Family support is very important.

In terms of the definition of that measure, it is measuring the percentage of children notified, with a subsequent notification within 12 months. The measure indicates the quality of the decision making at intake stage and also whether intake resources are well targeted. Renotification does not necessarily mean that a child has been further harmed; however, someone was sufficiently concerned about a child to make a report that requires some sort of response. That is probably the appropriate thing that should be done. If a person has a concern, let us run that concern to ground.

A high level of renotification may mean that an inadequate response was made to the first notification. Therefore, a second report is made. It is also inefficient because the work involved in responding to a notification—for example, recording information, checking previous child protection history, providing advice and making a referral—has to be done more than once.

Let me get to the nitty-gritty of what you are asking, that is, how it compares with other states. One of the most critical areas of need is to ensure that the six states and the two territories can compare apples with apples rather than apples with oranges. In terms of the government report that comes down every January—we all are interested in looking at that in terms of outcome and output measures—in the child protection system there is not enough comparative data available to get that comparison. Let me assure you that as a department, in terms of our transparency, accountability and openness, we are working as much as we possibly can on getting the data so that we can actually then examine ourselves. I referred to the ministerial council meeting in Hobart on 28 July. My ministerial colleagues have exactly the same concern. Every state and territory has been subject to the same concerns about

child abuse that Queensland has. So we all have that concern and we are all working together in a collaborative, cooperative way so we can make those sorts of comparisons.

Mrs STUCKEY: I thank the deputy chair and chair of this committee for the opportunity to ask the minister some questions. Minister, in relation to the initial assessments undertaken as a consequence of a complaint, would you be able to tell the committee how many outstanding initial assessments there were as at 30 June 2004? What was the average time taken from the initial contact with the department by a concerned individual and the completion of the initial assessment as at 30 June 2004? By the end of this financial year, what do you expect the department's target time to be from the initial contact with the department by a concerned individual and the completion of the initial assessment?

Mr REYNOLDS: I am absolutely delighted to answer that question. It is an important one. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my commitment to addressing the current initial assessment workload being experienced by the Department of Child Safety. When we talk about notifications going up in their thousands, we talk about workload. On 18 March this year I established a task force to oversee the implementation of strategies across the department to address the backlog of initial assessments. At the commencement of the task force a benchmark was established to determine how long on average it takes to conduct an assessment. From this, workloads can be monitored to determine if assessments are falling outside of reasonable time frames. Any assessment beyond these benchmarks is considered to be the initial assessment backlog.

Since the implementation of this task force the number of initial assessments backlogged has reduced from 3,058 to 1,375—a reduction of some 55 per cent. I take this opportunity to thank the dozens of staff right across Queensland who have actually worked overtime—worked their butts off—to get those notifications down. Strategies that have been implemented to address this backlog include the creation of 173 temporary positions, the deployment of experienced central office and regional office staff to area offices, the use of structured overtime including weekend work, the restructuring of area office teams to enable close supervision and monitoring of initial assessment workloads, the location of senior practitioners in area offices and the acquisition of additional vehicles and computers to make more efficient use of time. Just recently I was down at the Gold Coast office complimenting them on the backlog reduction that they have, and they have all worked very, very hard in that regard.

Despite the department experiencing record numbers of incoming notifications since March 2004, averaging over 1,600 per month, the backlog continues to be reduced. In June 2004 the number of incoming notifications requiring an initial assessment response was 1,623 and the number of initial assessments finalised was 2,498. This is the largest number completed in a one-month period.

In terms of the times that we are pursuing, we have priority 1, 2 and 3 notifications. Priority 1 notifications we would like to see commence in a 24-hour period, naturally, given the gravity of many of those notifications. Priority 2 we would like to see commence within a two-week period and priority 3 in a one-month period in terms of commencing the actual work on the notification. The new system will provide the data we require on time. What we are saying is that in February we had 5,350 outstanding child protection notifications requiring an initial assessment response across the state. The backlog at that date was 3,058. The backlog as at 31 May was 1,371. I can assure you we are doing all we can to get rid of the backlog and at the same time do the work that is coming in.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, in previous years visitors did not have the powers to visit children in foster care. Would you please outline the criteria for a community visitor, how many community visits there will be and how many times a year these visits will occur? Is there any flexibility to increase or reduce that number of visits depending on need?

Mr REYNOLDS: That is a question that should rightly have been asked of the Premier yesterday who has under his control the Commission for Children and Young People, but I would like my DG just to give a response to some of that if we could.

Dr Sullivan: The proposed model will be that all children in alternative care—that is, foster care and relative care—will be visited at least once a month or on request of the child or young person. So, in terms of your question, if the child or young person requests a visit, then they can have a visit on demand or on request.

My understanding is that the visitors will be recruited locally so they are aware of the local scene and services. I cannot give you a verbal account of the role description and the requirements, but that is certainly on the commission's web site and recruitment is taking place at the moment. My understanding is that the community visitors will also change depending on where the children are. So if a child, for example, were in foster care at Currumbin and that child was moved to north Queensland for some reason, the need for a community visitor on the Gold Coast might decline and the need for community visitors in north Queensland might increase. So they are paid at a sessional rate and their location is determined as to where the children are. I think that answers everything except the job description.

Mrs STUCKEY: I do have a question for you, Minister. On 17 December the Beattie government announced more money—\$11.7 million—to meet the cost of looking after an increasing number of children and young people with high needs and disabilities who are not suitable for foster care, many of

whom have challenging behaviours and require 24-hour care. Would the minister please advise how many children were in this category or level of care as of 30 June 2004, and what was the budget for this category of care for the last financial year? Lastly, how much was the actual spent last financial year on this category of care?

Mr REYNOLDS: I agree with you. First of all, this area of alternate care and therapy that is required for children and young people with severe behavioural problems, health problems or disabilities was a major concern of the CMC and it is, of course, a major concern of the Department of Child Safety. One of the things we have done in the department's budget is provide moneys in our 2004-05 budget to buy in extra services from Disability Services Queensland and also to buy in other services from the Health Department as well.

Throughout the 2003-04 financial year, the department provided individualised placement and support funding packages to 285 children and young people in care. Their high level of support needs required the development of an individualised package designed to meet their particular needs. In 2002-03 the costs of supporting—I am going back one financial year—children in placement and support packages was \$13.9 million. In 2003-04 these costs escalated to \$21 million.

The significant increase in placement and support packages can be attributed to two factors: firstly, the increasing needs of children in care. These needs can be summarised: increased supervision requirements, complex behaviour management strategies, complex medical care regimes and high levels of therapeutic intervention. These children require intensive case management. Many of the children engage in self-harming behaviour, misuse of substances involving solvent abuse, significant violent behaviour against other children and animals, and engage in sexually inappropriate behaviour.

Secondly, with regard to the current capacity of the alternative care system, we are putting more money not only into the disability services area but a \$13.2 million package announced in April, and we have received about 103 applications, including from the Gold Coast, in regard to alternative care placements and therapeutic support that can be given.

The CHAIR: The time block for non-government members' questions has expired.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, in your answer to a previous question by the member for Burdekin, you touched on the role of the Child Guardian. I am very interested in this area. Could you please explain further the role of the Child Guardian and how this function works to ensure effective oversight of the decisions of your new department?

Mr REYNOLDS: I am pleased to advise that the establishment of a new Office of the Child Guardian will enhance Queensland's child protection system's external accountability. It is another example of the department's absolute determination to be as open and accountable as possible in a brand new era of child protection in Queensland. As a result of recent legislation, an Office of the Child Guardian will be established within the Commission for Children and Young People and will be responsible for the oversight of the operations of the Department of Child Safety. That is our most important monitor.

In particular, this position will respond to complaints in relation to a child coming within the jurisdiction of the department. A new statutory office of assistant commissioner will also be created to be responsible to the Children's Commissioner for the carrying out of those Child Guardian functions. In implementing the CMC recommendations, the commissioner in carrying out the responsibilities of the new role of the Child Guardian will have specific monitoring functions in relation to children and the child safety system. These functions will include monitoring the handling of cases as well as systems, policies, practices and procedures.

As a further accountability measure, outcomes of the Child Guardian functions will be reported annually to the parliament. The stage 1 legislative amendments—the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004, which was passed by parliament on 16 June—established the role of Child Guardian within the commission. The Child Guardian will have a range of functions including the monitoring, auditing and reviewing of the handling of cases of children in the child safety system by the Child Safety Department and other service providers as well, whether they are state government departments or non-government organisations. It will also include the monitoring, auditing and reviewing of the systems, policies and practices of the department and other service providers that affect children in the child safety system. It will include the investigation of matters relating to services provided to children in the child safety system, and it will also seek to resolve disputes about reviewable decisions with the department.

The role is an extremely important part of the reforms to the child protection system in Queensland, and it really reaffirms the Beattie government's commitment to sharing the responsibility across a range of agencies. I look forward to working closely with the new Commissioner for Children and Young People and strengthening this partnership through the new role of Child Guardian. Any move to further protect the children of Queensland and make the new Department of Child Safety more accountable and transparent is very much welcome. That was indeed the cornerstone of the CMC's recommendations. We are no longer going to be a department which may have been criticised as being

inward looking. We are going to be a department and a proud staff who will be able to measure our own standards and have others measure those standards as well, and that is all in the interests of the child.

Mr FRASER: Minister, I want to touch on the use of commercial accommodation by the department. I understand a number of children who come into contact with the Department of Child Safety have complex and extreme needs which may not be suited to traditional foster care environments. I know some of these children are often placed in commercial accommodation until a suitable placement can be found for them. Can you outline to the committee how often this occurs and what measures are in place to ensure that these children receive secure and adequate support?

Mr REYNOLDS: One of the toughest aspects of my job as minister is to read the briefs which cross my desk daily outlining the plight of some of our most vulnerable and troubled children. The dedicated staff in the department work tirelessly day after day in a bid to ensure that the 4,200 children and young people who have come under care and protection orders are placed in a safe and caring environment.

The reality faced by the department is that some of these young people have extreme support needs or may display a range of inappropriate and high-risk behaviours directed towards other children, young people and adults, making them difficult to place within the existing foster care and alternative care systems. It is a sad fact that in addition to having experienced abuse themselves some of these young people engage in self-harming behaviour or substance abuse and display significant violent behaviours against children and animals, and can sometimes be a sexual risk to other children.

Emergency commercial accommodation is usually accessed for these young people when foster care arrangements cannot ensure their safety or the safety of other children within the placement. Between July 2003 and June 2004, 155 children or young people were placed in paid commercial accommodation for a combined total of 1,829 days. These placements occurred as there were no other suitable placements immediately available for the children or young people involved.

Additionally, it is a departmental policy that youth workers are engaged to provide 24-hour support and assistance to those children and young people placed in temporary commercial accommodation. These arrangements are used as an interim measure to ensure the immediate safety of children whilst individualised care arrangements can be developed to meet the specific needs of each child or young person. While placed in commercial accommodation, thorough assessments are made regarding the child or young person's needs and alternative placement options are identified and explored.

In terms of the CMC report, the very fact that we have allocated \$13.2 million this year to increase the number of alternative case placements by about 120 is evidence of the fact that there is a need out there. At the moment we have 320 alternative care placements. We want to bring that up to about 680 over a three-year period. So I can indicate that we are well on the way to getting those alternative care placements with the therapeutic treatment that is quite often required.

We are committed to increasing the number of alternative care places for young people. I am pleased to say that significant progress has been made to implement those recommendations to expand the range of placement options available. \$58.4 million has been allocated for the next three years to meet this need and will ensure that the use of commercial accommodation is phased out in the future.

Mr ENGLISH: I note the department is undertaking a massive recruitment campaign to employ an additional 318 staff this year, including people from interstate. What is the department doing to ensure a fair distribution of these positions is made available to indigenous people?

Mr REYNOLDS: It is very important that we work on this as a key priority because the indigenous people of Queensland are gravely overrepresented in these statistics. Indigenous staff within the department will play a pivotal role in strengthening the support of indigenous service delivery. The value and expertise of indigenous workers is critical to ensuring the best outcomes for indigenous families, young people and children.

My department will continue to invest in strategies to recruit, retain and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including discussions we are having with Queensland universities and TAFE to develop alternative prerecruitment initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We have targeted promotional liaison with indigenous units at universities and TAFE. We have the focused cultural competence training for our own staff to ensure that indigenous people do not feel alienated when working with the Department of Child Safety and to ensure that our employees have the skills, knowledge and abilities to work effectively with indigenous children, families and communities. We are offering cadetships and scholarships for indigenous people to be part of the new Department of Child Safety—the new culture and ethos that we have.

As well as that there is the deployment of specified and identified positions as a tool to ensure that appointees to jobs have the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to provide culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. All of the child safety officer positions that were advertised in May were specified positions. This means that applicants had to demonstrate that they can communicate and work effectively with indigenous clients. A further 50 child

safety support officer positions were advertised at the same time, and they were all identified positions. That actually means that an identified position is one which must be filled by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. To ensure a fair distribution of positions available to indigenous applicants, the Department of Child Safety will undertake work force planning, taking into account important factors such as the proportion of indigenous clients and location demographics.

I want to say today that both the director-general and myself are genuinely committed to ensuring that we increase the number and salary classification levels of indigenous staff to vastly improve service delivery to indigenous people. The two things that we are required to do is to, first of all, increase the service delivery to indigenous members of our community and, secondly, ensure that in most cases we have indigenous staff working with the indigenous people in that service delivery. As I said before, the ACAS, of course, will also have a major role to play in service delivery as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That brings the committee's examination of estimates for the Child Safety portfolio to a close. Minister, on behalf of the committee I thank you and your advisers for assisting us today. The committee will break until 10.45 and resume to examine the estimates for the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

Mr REYNOLDS: Madam Chair, can I thank the estimates committee. This is a new department, and I thank you for the questions you have given me today. Could I also, once again, thank my very hardworking ministerial team and members of the department who have worked incredibly hard in the first five months. Thank you very much indeed.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr HORAN: On behalf of the opposition, we thank you and your staff as well.

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much.

Sitting suspended from 10.32 a.m. to 10.47 a.m.

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B—ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE**In Attendance**

Hon. R.J. Welford, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

Department of Justice and Attorney-General

Ms R. Hunter, Director-General

Mr D. Schulz, Executive Director, Research and Executive Services (Acting)

Mr J. McGowan, Executive Director, Justice Administration (Acting)

Mr P. Morgan, Director, Financial Services

The CHAIR: The hearing is now resumed. Welcome, Mr Attorney, and welcome to your advisers. I will introduce you to the committee. Looking at the government side, my name is Julie Attwood, I am the member for Mount Ommaney and chair of the committee; we have Desley Scott, member for Woodridge; Andrew Fraser, member for Mount Coot-tha; and John English, member for Redlands. On the non-government side there is the honourable Lawrence Springborg, Leader of the Opposition; Rosemary Menkens, member for Burdekin, who will be deputy chair; and Mark McArdle, member for Caloundra.

The proceedings today are governed by the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. Members of the public are reminded that they cannot participate in the proceedings and may be admitted to, or excluded from, the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. In accordance with the sessional orders, at least half the time for questions at today's hearing will be allotted to non-government members. The time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers to please identify themselves if they answer a question. I ask everyone in this chamber to ensure that mobile phones are switched off during the hearing.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Attorney-General and Minister for Justice open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Mr Attorney, you have five minutes to make your opening statement.

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Madam Chair, and members of the committee for the opportunity to present the estimates for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General today. I support the proposal before the committee.

I am pleased to discuss the 2004-05 budget for my department and comment on its activities during the past 12 months. One of the more important activities, of course, was the state election in February. As minister responsible for the Electoral Commission, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the commissioner, Bob Longland, and the staff of the Queensland Electoral Commission for their preparation and conduct of the election.

In February this year I also welcomed the permanent appointment of my new director-general, Rachel Hunter, who is in attendance today. Ms Hunter is guiding a very committed and professional work force of more than 2,200 staff in my portfolio. They will be working over the next 12 months to deliver a wide range of services aimed at building on our department's mission, namely a safe, just and supportive community.

Another significant appointment in the last 12 months was Judge Marshall Irwin as Queensland's new Chief Magistrate. Judge Irwin is providing outstanding leadership, knowledge and guidance to ensure that our Magistrates Court continues to function efficiently and effectively as the truly people's court.

On the subject of our courts, in January I welcomed the Commonwealth Report on Government Services 2004. It is a national report which assesses government services across all jurisdictions. It showed that Queensland's courts continue to be amongst the most efficient and cost-effective in Australia, well ahead of national performance standards. There have been many achievements in my portfolio during the past 12 months, including the new Office of State Coroner, the evidence of children legislation and major milestones for our drug court, to name just a few.

The 2004-05 budget provides further impetus for our initiatives to reduce crime, strengthen protection for victims and support legal consumers. In line with these goals, the budget commits a further \$5.7 million over the next four years to the Office of the DPP to strengthen its capacity to prosecute criminal offences. This new funding will support comprehensive reforms to streamline work practices and develop and retain key staff. We will continue to be tough on crime and on the causes of

crime. This budget provides a further \$9.1 million over the next two years for the innovative and successful drug court program in south-east Queensland and the more recently established trial in north Queensland.

Our reform of the legal profession will have a practical effect in this financial year when a strong, independent Legal Services Commissioner will receive and manage all complaints against lawyers and law firms. As committee members would be aware, the Legal Services Commission will be funded by the interest on solicitors' trust accounts.

Our program to modernise the Queensland courts continues. A further \$32.6 million has been allocated in the coming financial year to complete the \$135 million new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex, which is scheduled to be finished by the end of this year. This project will deliver Queensland the most modern facility of its type anywhere in Australia. Funds have also been provided to modernise our regional courts, with specific projects in Mackay, Hervey Bay, Caloundra and Thursday Island. Our government's priority to protect vulnerable witnesses in our legal system is also being supported. We are investing a further \$1 million for state-of-the-art technology such as closed-circuit television.

This budget also recognises the impact of an ageing population, with a further \$2.1 million—invested over the next four years—for the Office of the Adult Guardian and the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal. The tribunal is dealing with an increasing number of guardianship applications and appointments of guardian.

Madam Chair, the 2004-05 state budget builds on our government's efforts to develop a modern, contemporary justice system that will support Queenslanders into the future. I thank you for the opportunity to make these opening comments and welcome questions from your committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Southern Downs.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Mr Attorney, it is good to be talking with you across the committee table again this year.

Mr Attorney, I refer you to the controversy surrounding the prosecution of swim coach Scott Volkens and the matters which have been dealt with to do with that in recent times. Mr Attorney, you are aware of the intention of some of the alleged victims to bring a private prosecution against Mr Volkens. Will you give this committee today an absolute guarantee that you will not seek to use your powers as Attorney-General to enter a nolle prosequi if the Supreme Court grants the complainants a right of private prosecution?

Mr WELFORD: Yes.

Mr SPRINGBORG: So you will not interfere?

Mr WELFORD: As far as I am concerned, there is no role for the Attorney-General to play a part in determining whether prosecutions should proceed. Both in the original decisions made in that regard affecting that case, and any future decisions, whether it be a private prosecution or not, these matters are properly matters to be dealt with by an independent process, in my view. It is a fundamental feature of the system that has been established to deal with decisions to charge and decisions to prosecute that those decisions should be exercised under a separation of powers, free from any political input.

The position of Attorney-General under our system of parliamentary democracy, while it has some responsibilities that require the exercise of independent discretion, is still part of the executive, unlike in jurisdictions like America where the Attorney-General is part of the executive but not part of the parliament. In the circumstances, I do not think it is appropriate for any Attorney under our system to be intervening in any way like you suggest.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Again, just to be absolutely clear, if the complainants are successful in the Supreme Court in gaining the right for a private prosecution you, as Attorney-General, will not stand in their way; that will be their right gained, and that is it?

Mr WELFORD: Yes.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Mr Attorney, have you had any discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions or the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions about their attitude regarding any potential private prosecutions?

Mr WELFORD: No.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think we did put in an application or a note to the committee that we would like them present here today. I do not think they are present, but I suppose you would be reluctant for us to talk to them, Mr Attorney. They are independent statutory officers.

Mr WELFORD: You are welcome to write to them. They are, as you say, independent statutory officers. As I understand it, the director is today involved in court and the deputy is away from the office today at a conference, I think, or some such thing. The matters you raise are matters which you can

raise directly with them. I would be grateful, of course, if you do write to them, that you copy a letter to me just so that I am aware of it.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Absolutely, Mr Attorney. Further to that matter, Madam Chair, surrounding the controversy involving the withdrawal of the prosecution against swim coach Scott Volkens, I would like the Attorney to provide this committee with statistics on how many matters involving sexual allegations against children that have proceeded beyond committal have been dropped by the Director of Public Prosecutions in the last three years.

Mr WELFORD: I do not have the figures on that for the last three years. I am not sure whether there is any particular special feature about prosecutions for sexual offences, as distinct from all other offences, in which it is the responsibility of the DPP to assess the available evidence and to determine whether a prosecution should be proceeded with.

The thing that the committee needs to bear in mind is that the decision whether to prosecute—a decision uniquely within the statutory responsibility of the DPP—is a decision which the DPP and its prosecutors exercise every day of the week. Now, I understand that this particular matter, partly because of the profile of the accused, has had significant public discussion. But the fact of the matter is that the responsibility exercised by the DPP in this matter is no different to the same responsibility they exercise day in, day out, week in, week out in respect of all briefs that come to them throughout the year.

In some cases the decision is made at an early stage that the evidence is not sufficient. Sometimes police charge a person and then subsequently do not proceed to committal; sometimes they proceed to committal and then do not proceed to trial; sometimes they get to the door of the trial and suddenly the defence produces some evidence which results in a nolle prosequi being entered. There are even cases where a trial commences and in the course of the evidence being presented by both sides it transpires that the evidence of the prosecution is not sufficient to sustain a verdict of guilty beyond reasonable doubt and a nolle prosequi can be entered mid trial.

These are very standard, par-for-the-course decisions which prosecutors have to make and, despite all the inquiries that have been made, there is nothing to suggest that they made that decision inappropriately or incorrectly in this case.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Madam Chair, before I go to my next question I just want to seek clarification from the Attorney that he will endeavour to provide us with the figures for the number of matters that have been dropped involving sexual allegations made by children against a person that proceeded beyond committal in the last three years.

Mr WELFORD: If those records are kept, then certainly I will make those figures available. I will also make available figures in relation to all other prosecutions not proceeded with in similar circumstances.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think you can understand my concern with regards to this, because we all know that there are certain discretions that have to be exercised and that happens, as you quite properly point out. However, one of the concerns with regards to this case is that there may have been a departure from the normal scrutiny of evidence which has been brought forward to cause that to happen and people are concerned that there were extraordinary circumstances behind this. If you are able to provide similar case examples then that may help to address some people's concerns. That is why I raise that particular matter.

The CHAIR: Minister, would you be able to take that question on notice for the committee?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, I will take that on notice.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Madam Chair, I refer the Attorney to the new streamlined work practices which are being adopted in the DPP's office—page 1-3 of the MPS. Will these new streamlined work practices include a mechanism to review decisions such as those made by the current director and deputy director in refusing to prosecute in the Scott Volkens matter because of the extraordinary nature of the dealing that went on behind the scenes between the prosecution and the defence? I say that because in this case evidence which had been put forward at that discussion by the defence was not tested in the normal way that it was usually tested because, as you would know, the police are usually sent out or someone is usually sent out to test that particular evidence before a decision is made.

Mr WELFORD: I do have to step in here and caution you about the path you are taking which appears to be directed at impugning the reputation and professionalism of the DPP. As I said before, decisions about whether to prosecute or not are decisions routinely made by professional prosecution staff; they are professional criminal lawyers and they make that decision on the basis of the material before them provided by the police and from time to time submissions made by defence representatives. That is common practice. There is nothing extraordinary, contrary to your description of it, about that happening in this case.

Defence representatives are perfectly entitled in the course of the process of preparing a prosecution to make representations to the prosecution about whether the evidence justifies the prosecution proceeding or whether a nolle prosequi should be entered at some point. That is an ongoing

process of discussion between defence representatives and the prosecution. Indeed, I have had many comments by defence lawyers around town that they would like to have those discussions at a much earlier stage than what is currently occurring so that you do not have matters that end up only being resolved either on the day the court is to start or some time in the course of an aborted trial once the defence submissions are more fully understood. It is not extraordinary.

I note that you have been a little clumsy in your public statements about this matter previously, so much so that you were forced to issue a statement of apology to the defence lawyers involved in this matter. I urge you to be very cautious in the language you use. It is legitimate for you to be satisfied that the system is operating effectively, but to make comments that cast aspersions upon the professionalism of the DPP and its prosecuting lawyers is really beyond your responsibility and it is certainly not for me to second-guess the decisions that prosecutors make about whether to prosecute.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Madam Chair, nobody argues against the right of the Director of Public Prosecutions or her deputy to deal with these sorts of matters in a discreet way, but it was the CMC that drew some concerning conclusions, it is not just me that is drawing some concerning conclusions, and you are aware of what that report actually said.

Our issue is to ensure that that process which usually involves testing the contentions which are put forward by defence counsel are properly followed through before a decision is made, and I actually support the disclosure of evidence much earlier on because I think that it can streamline the process. It was the CMC that made some conclusions and drew some concerns, not just the opposition. That is what we are seeking to ensure: that there is a more robust process of testing the evidence put forward by the defence earlier on so we do not have these sorts of controversies. Do you have any comments on that?

The CHAIR: Order! I would like the member for Southern Downs to pose the question rather than make a statement.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I accept what you are saying, but what I am saying is that this is why we are raising the concern. The Attorney needs to be made aware that the CMC also concluded some concern about the handling of this matter by the DPP. He did not mention that.

The CHAIR: You do not have to argue the point with me, I just want you to ask your question.

Mr WELFORD: In relation to this matter, the Leader of the Opposition is, insofar as the decisions of the DPP are concerned, flogging a dead horse. Why? Because whatever comments may be made about the original decision, the matter has subsequently in any event gone back to the police. A further brief was provided, and that brief has been further reviewed by independent prosecutors interstate who came, on the basis of that further brief which presumably contained additional material, to the same conclusion. So you simply cannot take this anywhere; that is what I am suggesting to you. If you have got a concrete criticism to make based on some substantial evidence, then by all means make it, but you are wallowing around in the dark at the moment.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I would suggest that some of the information provided by the interstate prosecutors created a range of controversies in themselves.

Mr WELFORD: You don't know and I don't know what information that included. You don't know any more than what has been reported in the media and the media don't know, and neither do I or you, the full terms of the advice that was given.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Maybe now that you have said that this matter is up to the person to pursue it may come out in the long run. Going to page 1-3 regarding the additional funding of \$5.7 million to be provided to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions over the next four years, how much of that actual extra funding is to be provided in the 2004-05 year and what are the projected sums to be provided over each of the following three years?

Mr WELFORD: The portion of that money to be allocated to the DPP in this current financial year is \$1.5 million. In future years it is between \$1.1 million and \$1.2 million a year.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: In question on notice No. 8 I have asked you what funds you have allowed for in the budget to stem the burgeoning tide of juvenile crime and what legislation will you bring to the parliament to make people take responsibility for their crimes, including details of funding? In your answer you have indicated that that should be answered by the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. Could you enlarge on why that should be answered by that particular minister and not yourself?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the honourable member for his question and I apologise that I was not able to provide further information. For a number of years, since the early nineties, the policy and legislative responsibility for juvenile justice issues has been separated from the Department of Justice. It was, in fact, previously part of the Department of Justice back in the days when Justice and Corrective Services was a single department—early nineties, as I say.

In subsequent years, because it was seen to be appropriate to separate juvenile justice and juvenile detention issues from mainstream corrections issues, the juvenile justice policy and legislative

responsibility was separated and incorporated in the administrative responsibilities of the Department of Families, as it was then known, and now the Department of Communities.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: That is limited to policy and legislative responsibility?

Mr WELFORD: No, it also includes a budget for all administration of the juvenile justice system, which effectively means detention centres and suchlike. The policy about appropriate penalties and sentencing for juveniles is also within the Juvenile Justice Act, not in the Penalties and Sentences Act, and for that reason, although obviously I like to have an input into those matters to ensure consistency across the criminal justice system, the primary policy responsibility for the Juvenile Justice Act is with the Minister for Communities.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Obviously the application of that or the policing of that is with Police and Corrective Services.

Mr WELFORD: Yes.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: So policy versus operational?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. Of course, through the Juvenile Aid Bureau and other initiatives in relation to young people, there is some intersection in the sense that, for example, we have that drugs framework in relation to uses of minor amounts of drugs where police can exercise the police diversion system. We may hear more about that today, but beyond that, the issues relating to juveniles are separately managed by the Department of Communities through their juvenile justice division and the police department.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government members has expired. I call the member for Woodridge.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: I refer you to page 1-3 of the MPS and the establishment of the Legal Services Commission. Could you please provide the committee with an update on the commission and the other elements of the new complaints and discipline regime?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mrs Scott. Our new Legal Services Commission began operation on the first of this month. The commission is an important part of our government's reforms of the Queensland legal profession which represent a sea change for legal consumers. Our reforms have given consumers of legal services better access to information about the profession and a complaints system they can trust.

Anyone who now has a concern about the actions or behaviour of a lawyer can take their complaint to an independent umpire—the Legal Services Commissioner. The Legal Services Commissioner will manage those complaints. The commissioner will decide whether or not disciplinary action is taken against a lawyer and to what extent investigation is required.

A legal practice tribunal is being established. It will be chaired by a supreme court judge who will hear serious matters which could involve a lawyer being struck off or suspended. I am currently in the process of assessing applications for the appointment of lay members to that tribunal. Separately, there will be a legal practice committee which will hear less serious charges of unsatisfactory professional conduct. Similarly, there will be representatives from the solicitors' branch and the barristers' branch and lay representatives on that committee.

As for the Legal Services Commission, the committee may be aware that I have appointed Mr John Briton as our first Legal Services Commissioner. He is a former Queensland anti-discrimination commissioner who has experience in many facets of dispute management and public advocacy. Mr Briton is not a lawyer. Legal qualifications were not essential for the role. However, he does have a long and impressive record of management, dispute investigation and advocacy.

The second stage of our reforms, which was passed by parliament a couple of months ago, has cleared the way for Queensland's participation in a new national scheme of legal profession regulation. Nationally consistent rules will now govern professional conduct of lawyers. This will further improve the protection for legal consumers. For example, a lawyer who has been struck off or suspended in one state will automatically now not be able to practice in any other state. There will be mutual recognition of the qualifications of lawyers from other states. It will mean they will be able to operate here. Similarly, Queensland lawyers will be recognised in other jurisdictions and their courts.

Law firms will be able to establish multidisciplinary practices, bringing several professional services such as accountants and valuers under one roof. Of course added safeguards may well be needed to ensure only appropriate links are created and that there are no obvious conflicts of interest. Our reforms I believe ensure a system that builds confidence in the public about the standards of lawyers and the system for regulating their conduct.

Mr FRASER: Attorney, I would like to refer you back to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. At page 1-3 of the MPS it details additional funding of \$5.7 million over the next four years. Can you outline to the committee the timetable for implementing these reforms to the office?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr Fraser. I have made no secret of my commitment to build the Queensland Office of the DPP into one of the strongest offices of its type in the country. As a former lawyer in the Commonwealth Office of the DPP I came to this job with a keen commitment to see our state DPP recognised as one of the most professional in the nation.

The recent review of the DPP, overseen by my Director-General Rachel Hunter, has provided, I believe, a blueprint for positive change. It will help build on the revitalisation process I began more than two years ago. The review produced 35 recommendations. As the Premier has said, these recommendations will not gather dust. Cabinet has committed to implementing every single one of them.

As an indication of that commitment, additional funding of \$5.7 million over the next four years was allocated in the budget to support the implementation of the recommendations. The first step in these changes has already been taken with the appointment of a new executive director in the office of the DPP, Ms Jan Archer. Ms Archer is a former Deputy Commissioner of Fair Trading and brings a strong record of achievement in change management and system design to the new position.

She will support the Director of Public Prosecutions in implementing the review recommendations and provide expert advice in respect of budgets, human resource management, work performance and practice management. The implementation of all the recommendations has already begun. It is anticipated that that implementation process should be complete within 12 months.

I will give you an idea of the sorts of things that will be implemented. A chamber work groups system will be established in the Brisbane office of the DPP to ensure early intervention of crown prosecutors in all prosecutions and the proactive resolution of matters and continuity of representation. Additional staff will be provided to Ipswich, Toowoomba and Beenleigh to relieve work pressures in those regional offices. Improving work conditions in the Townsville office will be achieved by relocating that office to larger premises.

We will be ensuring the DPP has access to highly skilled prosecution barristers at the private bar by making the Office of the DPP fees for briefing-out prosecutions more competitive and parallel with legal aid brief-out fees. We will be improving relations with other criminal justice agencies and supporting strategies to develop the skills and retain crown prosecutors in the Office of the DPP so we can attract the best and brightest young lawyers to the office.

We will also be introducing new legal practice management techniques, including developing a performance management framework, to demonstrate achievement effectively. I am confident the reforms that come out of this blueprint will be the foundation to ensure the DPP establishes a high standard and complete confidence of the legal profession, the judiciary and the Queensland people.

Mr ENGLISH: Mr Attorney, in the MPS you make reference to the Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit. Having previously worked in this area within the Queensland Police Service I am very much interested in this area. Could you provide some detail of what the unit does and the contribution it is making to offset the social costs of criminal activity?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr English. I appreciate your particular interest in this matter. It is something that I think was not given sufficiently dedicated attention in recent years either by the Police Service or the DPP. I would like to, firstly, congratulate the CMC, the DPP and, in particular, the Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit within the DPP for the work they are doing.

I established this specialist Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit in January 2003 as part of our government's commitment to crackdown on organised crime. The establishment of the unit coincided with the introduction, again by me, of the Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act 2002 which allowed non-conviction based recovery of assets to a civil standard.

These new laws gave law enforcement agencies new tools to fight organised crime through powers to seize the property and assets of people involved in serious criminal activity. The civil confiscation scheme places a greater onus on suspected criminals to prove their unexplained wealth and to prove that it has been obtained legally and not as part of the proceeds of illicit criminal activity.

The CMC coordinates investigations, preparing evidence for applications to the Supreme Court by the Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit. Those applications can seek to restrain or forfeit property. The applications are made to prevent suspected criminals from disposing of their assets prior to conviction through restraint orders. As you can imagine, these need to be made, in some cases, with a good deal of urgency.

Since the new laws were introduced in January \$17.67 million in assets of suspected criminals have been frozen under the new civil scheme. This includes assets valued at \$10.54 million in the previous 2003-04 financial year. These types of assets include: catamarans, jet skis, residential Gold Coast canal properties, luxury cars, significant bank account holdings, large amounts of cash, property and other boats. In almost all instances, suspected criminals are challenging the applications made for them to forfeit the assets, as you would appreciate. However, some are now attempting to settle their confiscation claims. Four settlements totalling about \$1.2 million are now being processed.

The Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit also recovers assets under the conviction based scheme. It has collected approximately \$900,000 by way of pecuniary penalty orders and forfeiture orders in the previous financial year.

The CHAIR: I refer to page 1-11 of the MPS and the future of court services and ask whether the you have any plans to review compensation for Queenslanders who are required for jury service?

Mr WELFORD: Queenslanders who serve on juries undertake a vital civic duty on behalf of the whole community. It is important that we support and encourage the contribution these Queenslanders make to our criminal justice system. Our government has recently completed a review of the allowances paid to juries. The last real increase in allowances was in 1991, some 13 years ago.

The last examination of rates occurred in 1997 when the coalition government decided against any increase in base allowances. Instead, the then government added in a lunch allowance of \$8, which was to be deducted if the lunch was provided. Effectively, the allowances have stayed the same since 1991. I think it is fair to say that if you have no increase in allowances over 13 years the amount paid falls a long way behind what it should be. I note the member for Caloundra is expressing his disgust at that situation.

Following the review we have recently conducted, I am pleased to announce to the committee that Queenslanders who serve on juries are about to receive higher allowances and access to counselling services. In fact, jury fees in Queensland will, from next month, be amongst the highest in Australia. The daily rate for serving on a jury will be \$90, in line with the minimum wage. This will increase to \$120 a day if a trial goes beyond 20 days. For a three-day trial, which is the average trial length in Queensland, jurors will now receive \$270 compared with \$153 previously. That is an increase of 76 per cent on what jurors in standard length trials will now receive. The attendance allowance for people summoned for jury service but not empanelled will also be increased to \$30 a day, an increase of \$8 a day.

We will also introduce a juror support program which will include access to counselling services. Why are we doing this? Many people who serve on juries find the process difficult and distressing, particularly where cases involve serious violence. They may find cases of, for example, sexual abuse or violence disturbing, particularly if they have to consider graphic evidence. To help overcome some of these problems we will provide information briefs and brochures to prospective jurors so that they are prepared for the trial that they will encounter. But we will also make available through my department counselling services for any juror who feels they need support after the trial ends.

There will be no changes to the current model for jury service by which people are selected at random off the electoral roll. But we will provide jurors with greater support financially and other ways than we have ever done before.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: I refer to the government's ongoing support for the drug court. Could you please update the committee on the south-east Queensland program and the trial in North Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: The drug court has now entered its fifth year of operation and is a proven success in making Queensland a safer place to live. It has shown that the cycle of drug addiction and drug related crime can be broken. That is why in this budget we are committing a further \$9.1 million over the next two years for the agencies who are involved in the program.

There have been some significant milestones in the drug court over the past 12 months especially. Last July the Australian Institute of Criminology found the drug court had been a success in breaking the cycle of drug related crime. The AIC reported that the level of recidivism was 'significantly reduced for those who successfully complete the drug court program'.

Last month the drug court celebrated its 100th graduation and the four-year anniversary of the south-east Queensland program. 100 graduates is a very positive outcome not only for the families of these people but also for the entire community. Research tells us that about three in every four crimes, particularly property crimes, is drug related. So every successful rehabilitation means there are fewer crimes being committed. Of the 100 graduates, 92 have come from the south-east Queensland program and eight from the more recently North Queensland trial. The south-east Queensland drug court sits in three locations—Ipswich, Southport and Beenleigh. Since the south-east Queensland program began four years ago there have been 428 people placed on intensive drug rehabilitation orders.

Of these, about 50 per cent have been able to stick with the program. This rate reflects the nature of the powerful addictions that we are trying to overcome—serious drugs such as heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. An individual rehabilitation process can take between 12 and 18 months, and despite best intentions it is simply a fact that some find it too hard and so are sent back to court to be sentenced. But the great value of the drug court is the social benefit it delivers. There are now 100 graduates who have reclaimed their lives, many families who have recovered their sons and daughters and a lot of crime not now being committed. There are currently still 102 people on rehabilitation programs—54 in south-east Queensland and another 48 in north Queensland—so we can expect to see some more success stories in the months ahead.

Mr FRASER: Attorney, on page 1-10 of the MPS reference is made to the government's illicit drug diversion program in the Brisbane Magistrates and Children's Court. Could you inform the committee of the progress and effectiveness of this program?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, Mr Fraser. This drug diversion program is separate from the drug court. It is the diversion program I referred to earlier in my response to the Leader of the Opposition. It is part of the Queensland drugs strategic framework, an approach involving all agencies with a role in drug policy development. It comes under the umbrella and with the support of the Commonwealth's National Illicit Drug Strategy. It is designed to give people who are charged with possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use the chance of rehabilitation through drug education and treatment. It is conducted out of the Roma Street arrest court, the central Magistrates Court and the Brisbane Children's Court.

The aim is to get to people early and intervene before they become hooked on drugs. By addressing drug use in this way, we can prevent a whole new generation of people committing drug related crimes. Like our drug courts, it has strict eligibility criteria. It targets offenders charged with possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use, and there are no drugs that are excluded from this trial. Up until the end of June, 1,064 offenders have been diverted under this program for drug diversion assessment, education and treatment sessions. Some 57 of the offenders were juveniles. I am pleased to say that the program has received widespread support, especially from magistrates, police prosecutors, defence solicitors and other service providers, not to mention the offenders. The general feedback is that the program provides a valuable alternative to the formal judicial process of fining and suspended sentences.

The compliance rate for offenders during the program has been outstanding really—between 92 per cent and 96 per cent. We all know that the use of illicit drugs by young people is every parent's nightmare, so this diversion program gives us a chance to ensure that young people get a wake-up call without sending them to jail. It helps individuals take personal responsibility and regain control of their lives. I think it is also contributing to a safer environment for all Queenslanders and helping to reduce considerable personal and social costs of drug use in our community.

Mr ENGLISH: With regard to the government's efforts to protect vulnerable witnesses, could the Attorney provide some details about the improvements in court facilities that will occur in the next 12 months to assist these victims?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr English. The protection of vulnerable witnesses is something highlighted in the MPS. We have a strong commitment to victims in our courts. This commitment is reflected not only in our capital works program but also in the legislative reforms such as the Evidence of Children Act, which I introduced and which was passed last year. As part of our courts' modernisation program, we are making specific improvements to ensure the criminal justice system is more effective in dealing with vulnerable witnesses. Closed-circuit television, which I mentioned earlier, videoconferencing and special waiting rooms for vulnerable witnesses and domestic violence complainants are changing the face of our courts. Closed-circuit TV in the courtroom enables children and sexual assault victims to give evidence from a protected room without having to be confronted with the defendant in the courtroom.

In this coming financial year, I will be committing a further \$1 million to expand the number of courts equipped with closed-circuit TV and videoconferencing. Another three locations will be equipped in the next 12 months in addition to the 14 higher court locations now available. The installation of videoconferencing facilities in all of these centres will link the Magistrates Court to closed-circuit TV facilities as well.

The CHAIR: The time block for government members has expired.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, page 1-13 of the MPS documentation refers to 33,000-odd domestic violence orders having been made in the last financial year. Can you provide details or take on notice these questions: the number of applications that were in fact filed during that period; how many of those applications were made by the police; during the year, how many breaches of orders were dealt with by the court; and, of those breaches, how many convictions resulted?

The CHAIR: That is a very complex question.

Mr McARDLE: I do suggest you take it on notice.

Mr WELFORD: Yes, we can take that on notice. I am not sure whether every part of that question can be met by information held by the courts—for example, how many applications were made by police as distinct from other parties. But, to the extent that that information can be gathered, we are happy to take it on notice.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you indeed. On that same page we have the number of matters lodged with regard to criminal law, but I note that there are no details there concerning the Children's Court that I can pick up. Are they grouped together under the title 'Magistrates Court'? If they are, can you elicit

details of the number of criminal matters dealt with by that court and the number of matters yet to be dealt with by the court irrespective of when they were lodged?

Mr WELFORD: My understanding would be that, in relation to juvenile criminal matters dealt with in the Children's Court, they would be included in the Magistrates Court aggregate figures there. I am not quite sure how this relates to the estimates for the forthcoming year.

Mr McARDLE: I am just breaking down the figures, Attorney.

Mr WELFORD: The estimates are financial. These figures you can get, frankly, by going to the Parliamentary Library and looking at the Children's Court annual report.

Mr McARDLE: I accept that.

Mr WELFORD: I encourage you to do that any time you like.

Mr McARDLE: Will you take it on notice though and provide those details?

Mr WELFORD: Why don't you have a look at the Children's Court report, because they will all be there? They have an annual report for the Children's Court. But I am happy to take it on notice and see what we can find out for you.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you. Also, with the Magistrates Court there are a number of Commonwealth matters that are dealt with by the court with regard to the Family Law Act and also the Crimes Act in particular.

Mr WELFORD: Yes.

Mr McARDLE: Are those figures comprised in the figures here in the documentation?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, they would be.

Mr McARDLE: So those figures are Children's Court, Commonwealth matters and state jurisdiction as well?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. All civil and criminal matters commenced are in these aggregate figures, yes.

Mr McARDLE: I turn to the Legal Aid Office for one moment. Page 5-1 of the MPS states that part of the brief of that office is to assist people who are unable to pay for their own legal fees for one reason or another. Attorney, you may or may not be aware that part of the process in determining the application is what is called the means test, and that also incorporates the value of houses either owned and/or occupied by the applicant. You would be aware that there has been a large increase in the value of houses throughout Queensland in the last, say, two to three years. Do you know whether the Legal Aid Office will increase its threshold value of houses in determining the criteria for legal assistance? As I understand, that figure has not increased significantly for a number of years now. So will there be an increase to assist those people?

Mr WELFORD: I am advised, Mr McArdle, that the assets test which is part of, as you know, the assessment that the Legal Aid Office makes is under review.

Mr McARDLE: Is there any indication as to when that review may be completed and whether it will comprise an element to do with house values?

Mr WELFORD: It will obviously focus on the value of the principal place of residence of the person, and I would anticipate that it will be finalised within the next three to four months.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you indeed. At page 5-5 of the MPS the Legal Aid Office states that it intends to increase fees in criminal matters. Is there any indication as to when that may occur or details as for what type of matters? If not the increase itself, is there a range or percentage that the increase will cover?

Mr WELFORD: These are the brief-out fees that you are referring to for representation of Legal Aid Clients?

Mr McARDLE: That is right, yes.

Mr WELFORD: The board of Legal Aid is responsible for authorising these changes. I have been aware that the board has already approved the increases for brief-out fees. My understanding is that the increased fees have already been brought into operation this month.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you indeed. The Legal Aid Office lists as one of the major impacts at page 5-1 of the MPS on its staff and duties the constant demand for criminal law services. Are you able to advise the committee by way of comparison figures of applications lodged, say, in 2002-03 and 2003-04 for assistance with regard to criminal matters both state and Commonwealth, or mainly state in these circumstances?

Mr WELFORD: I would imagine that we can get those figures for you. If I can get them before the end of today's proceedings, I will announce them to the committee. If not, we can take it on notice. Again, I commend to you the annual report of the Legal Aid Office, because the sort of data you are

asking for—while I am perfectly happy for you to ask, and you are certainly entitled to know—are things that you could readily access I would imagine if you simply look at their annual reports each year.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you. Attorney, are you aware in relation to the duty lawyer scheme of tenders that have been successful through Legal Aid on either a nil tender figure or a very low tender figure?

Mr WELFORD: I am not aware of the precise details of the tender amounts, but I am aware that the process is very competitive. I understand there have been on occasions—I am not sure in which locations—some tenders that have come in on a virtually nil or very small amount. I am not sure what particular details you are seeking, but suffice to say that I think the system that the Legal Aid Office in Queensland has put in place ensures that we are able to maximise the accessibility of advice from duty lawyers, at least in cost to the community, in a way that is more efficient than ever in the past.

Mr McARDLE: But there are tenders that you are aware of that have been successful with a nil tender figure?

Mr WELFORD: I would have to check that to confirm. My recollection is that that may be the case. I am informed there has been at least one which was nil, yes.

Mr McARDLE: Was that of a recent origin do you know?

Mr WELFORD: I do not think so.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you. I return to the Volkens case. The CMC report raised a number of issues in relation to the process within the DPP. I am not focusing on the actual decision itself. One process that was of concern to the CMC was the undertaking that was given by the officer in the DPP at the time when he was handed statements by defence counsel. Are you aware of any guidelines that have now been put in place to circumvent the problem that arose in relation to receipt of those documents by the officer? One party in fact alleged he was undertaking A and the officer said he was undertaking B which raised some concern with the CMC.

Mr WELFORD: As you know, the CMC reported extensively on this. Again, while it is not really a matter relating to estimates, I will do you the indulgence of not objecting to your question. But the CMC has reported. The report of the CMC in many respects has been complemented by the blueprint for systems reform within the Office of the DPP that we are now implementing. The DPP is cooperating very closely with the CMC in the implementation of the recommendations of the CMC so far as they relate to the DPP. Whatever characterisation of the decision-making process might have previously occurred in relation to the matter you raise, I am confident that in future there will not be any issues arise.

I should again remind you and members of the committee that whatever reservations one may have held about that process it has, in effect, been cured by subsequent reviews, including the New South Wales assessment.

Mr McARDLE: The drug court program has now been running in south-east Queensland since about June 2000. Are you able to advise the committee at this point in time what the cost has been to operate that system?

Mr WELFORD: I think that the aggregate cost over all the four years so far exceeds \$20 million. We have some additional costs allocated, as you know, for the north Queensland trial. Up to the end of June, we are looking at about \$16 million to \$17 million for south-east Queensland. You need to remember that is not just my department; that includes Health, Families, Corrections, Housing and Police. For the north Queensland trial, the total funding provided up until this year for Townsville and Cairns is about \$24 million to \$25 million. The Cairns model is a slightly different model and the rehabilitation costs have increased since the first south-east Queensland trial was established.

Mr McARDLE: At page 1-13 you refer to a client satisfaction program being put in place for the forthcoming year in relation to court services being provided throughout Queensland. In the documentation for 2002-03, there was a similar survey undertaken but the notations thereto refer to that survey being undertaken in relation to domestic violence applications only insofar as the rate of the court staff and facilities were—

Mr WELFORD: Sorry, which page are you on?

Mr McARDLE: The initial page is 1-13. At the bottom it refers to client satisfaction with the court service. Eighty per cent is your target figure and the last documentation for 2003-04 referred to a similar survey, but based only on domestic violence applications dealing with the court staff and the facilities.

The CHAIR: If the member is intending to ask the question, could he please ask the question.

Mr McARDLE: You would agree that it would provide a very limited snapshot of the system that is provided by the Magistrates Court. Do you intend to widen the scope of that examination? If you do, what would be the criteria for the client survey in these circumstances?

Mr WELFORD: It is obviously an interesting point as to what extent you conduct a survey in order to determine whether the courts are effectively satisfying the needs of the people who use the system. You are right: the survey of people involved in one category of matters such as domestic violence is a snapshot in respect of that category. It may be that people in different categories of matters have different levels of satisfaction. Domestic violence matters are not necessarily matters that people are easily satisfied with because they involve great trauma and stress between parties.

Mr McARDLE: Exactly.

Mr WELFORD: I think the better answer to this for you is to let you know that the director-general has indicated to me recently that we want to actually do a review of these output measures to get a better handle on what it is that we actually should be measuring. These MPS across all departments often contain various line items that sometimes do not mean anything in particular. They are just statistical gathering without actually being focused on data that helps us perform better. So we are undertaking a review of all that at the moment and, hopefully, we will have a better set of measures that are more meaningful for you next year.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you indeed. Page 1-36 refers to the construction of the Caloundra Court House. Being the member for Caloundra, I have been asked by a number of people in that area in relation to the staffing of the courthouse by magistrates. Are you able to advise whether they will be full-time magistrates from the inception of the court or do you envisage a procedure of a roll-out whereby there will be visiting magistrates followed by an appointment of one or two magistrates in due course?

Mr WELFORD: Mr McArdle, you will be very chuffed to know that—

Mr McARDLE: I hope so—

Mr WELFORD: We are making a significant investment in the new courthouse in Caloundra. Obviously, I will have to have discussions with the Chief Magistrate in relation to the allocation of magistrates according to the level of work involved. As you know, we have a quite substantial facility at Maroochydore and we have not had a permanent magistrate at the old Caloundra Court House. But as the work develops—and, of course, the population of Caloundra city is growing dramatically—I suspect that it may not be too long before a full-time magistrate at Caloundra is needed. Obviously, that will be subject to the assessment of matters arising on the coast—whether there are spare facilities at Maroochydore. There may be some matters referred from Maroochydore to Caloundra if Maroochydore is busy. So really that is something that the Chief Magistrate will have to assess according to the flow of work that occurs once the new facility is open. But I can assure you that if the workload is there, then I would anticipate a magistrate being allocated.

Mr McARDLE: I have one final question. The Public Trustee Office collects funds from unclaimed moneys from various sources—deceased estates, et cetera. Are you aware of what the total of that fund may be at this point in time and how many people it relates to?

Mr WELFORD: I do not have that data at my fingertips, but we can certainly get it and make sure that it is made available to you.

Mr McARDLE: Will you undertake to do that?

Mr WELFORD: Absolutely.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you indeed. With the Public Trustee Office, are you aware at this point in time how many deceased estates that office is currently handling?

Mr WELFORD: The number?

Mr McARDLE: Yes.

Mr WELFORD: Of deceased estates that they are currently handling? That changes every day.

Mr McARDLE: I accept that. A ballpark figure, perhaps?

Mr WELFORD: I might be able to give you a ballpark figure. If I refer you to page 3-8 of the MPS, the top figure, 2,800.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you indeed.

Mr WELFORD: And growing.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government members has just about expired. It is time for government questions. I refer you to page 1-3 of the MPS and the ongoing work on the new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex and the new courthouse at Richlands in Brisbane's western districts. Could the Attorney-General update the committee on the progress of these projects?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. Just before I do, can I correct the record in relation to a figure that I gave about the north Queensland drug court? I miscalculated my addition of the various years so as to overstate the figure. The \$24 million that I mentioned for north Queensland funding—and I must confess when I said it it seemed like more than I thought—is, in fact, \$18 million. That \$18 million includes all

costs to the end of next year, which is funding allocated to the end of the current north Queensland trial period. Obviously, before the end of next year the government will have to make an assessment about whether to allocate further funds if we are to continue the operation of the drug court in north Queensland. My apologies for that.

In relation to the Brisbane Magistrates Court complex on the corner of George and Turbot streets, as I am sure you will appreciate, it will be a very modern judicial centre. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, it will involve 19 courtrooms for criminal and civil matters, two coroners courts and four hearing rooms for the Small Claims Tribunal. It will incorporate the very latest in environmental and communication technologies. For example, it will use rainwater tanks to collect 46,000 litres of water for use on external landscaping. They will have motion sensors in the rooms to lower lighting and airconditioning when rooms are not occupied. So it includes the latest environmental design technology, which I pioneered when I was the minister responsible for establishing the Environmental Protection Agency, advocating a new paradigm of resource efficiency across government as well across the community. Those principles of resource efficiency are now being incorporated in many new government buildings and this particular building will be a showcase of that.

There will be separate circulation paths for the public, the magistracy, and persons in custody—obviously for safety and security reasons. There will be electronic security systems and large waiting areas where relevant parties appearing before the courts can be physically separated to avoid any conflict. So far the project remains on budget and on target. If you drive down George Street at any time on your way to the Roma Street train station you will see its development unfolding. I anticipate that construction, as I mentioned earlier, will be completed by later this year with magistrates set to move in some time in November. Similarly, new District Court courthouses will be established at Richlands in the new western districts court complex and there will be a new police watch-house as part of that complex.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: With reference to the refurbishment of courthouses at Mackay and Hervey Bay, could you please outline the progress of these projects?

Mr WELFORD: Like the courthouses at Brisbane and Richlands, we are committed to modernising our justice system across regional Queensland. In March, I was in Mackay with the member for Mackay, Mr Mulherin, and officially opened the first stage of our \$11.4 million project to upgrade the Mackay Court House. Needless to say, the new extension is state-of-the-art with four new courtrooms, jury facilities and judicial chambers. There are two new magistrates courts, new courtrooms for sittings of the Supreme and District courts in Mackay, new witness and interview rooms, a jury assembly room, areas for court support groups and improved public waiting spaces. These facilities will not only benefit the general public but also in particular victims of sexual assault and domestic violence and provide private and discrete areas for lawyers to take instructions from their clients. There will also be better access for the disabled and improved amenities for the public and court staff.

When the project is completed there will be closed-circuit TV facilities so that child witnesses and sexual assault victims can give evidence from a separate room, thus reducing the trauma they face in giving evidence in court. The final stage of the project is almost completed and this involves the refurbishment of the existing historic courthouse, which was built more than 60 years ago. We will also be providing facilities in the new twin building facility for the State Reporting Bureau, the DPP office, and the Dispute Resolution Branch of my department.

Similarly, we are spending \$2 million on upgrading the Hervey Bay Court House. It will provide a courtroom for the District and Supreme courts to circulate to Hervey Bay, judges' and associates' chambers, jury room facilities, public gallery, holding cells and interview rooms. The higher court courtroom will ensure that there is less demand on the Maryborough Court House by enabling Hervey Bay to share the load for local matters. Closed-circuit TV facilities will also be installed and linked to courtroom monitors for vulnerable witnesses. The Hervey Bay Court House extension began last month. We expect construction to be completed by early next year. This refurbishment of courthouses both in Mackay and Hervey Bay will, I think, not only improve public safety within the court environment but also provide for a more efficient work space for everyone involved.

Mr FRASER: Attorney, following on from those questions, could you please outline the progress of the projects in constructing new courthouses at Thursday Island and Caloundra, which the member for Caloundra alluded to earlier?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. Both of these projects are also part of the Courts Modernisation Project. The construction of the Thursday Island Court House I anticipate will commence next month. It is being built on the corner of Douglas and Jardine streets on Thursday Island. This land was acquired from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing. The new facility will be a welcome update to the existing courthouse, which was originally constructed in 1935. You can see that it is not before time that Thursday Island enjoyed a new facility of this kind. Again, it will contain a new registry, rooms for vulnerable witnesses, new magistrates' chambers, courtroom, interview rooms and conference rooms. The facility will also include public waiting areas, an external dispute resolution area and disabled access.

In relation to the Caloundra complex, to be built in Gregson Place, adjacent to the police station, the new watch-house is being established there at the same time. Tenders for the Caloundra Court House are currently being evaluated. I am hopeful that construction will begin in the next couple of months, with completion due around the middle of next year. Similarly, this courthouse will have two new magistrates' courts and chambers, a new registry office and the usual complement of interview rooms, conference rooms and detention facilities. The building will be designed to allow expansion in future years to six new courtrooms if demands require it. The estimated total cost, by the way, of the Caloundra court project is just over \$7 million, including the cost of the land.

Mr ENGLISH: Attorney, I believe there is also some good news for north Brisbane and Bowen. Could you provide some more details of these projects?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. There will be new courthouses in Petrie and Bowen. The northern districts courthouse will be established at Petrie—an \$8 million project to serve the growing population of the Pine Rivers and Caboolture shires. The current Petrie Court House has served the area well but is now too small for the demands that are being placed on it. The new one will provide better access for people with disabilities. There are currently insufficient rooms for child witnesses or victims of domestic violence. We have decided to establish a new courthouse at Petrie. We have looked at several sites. They are currently being examined. The new courthouse, however, will include at least two magistrates' courtrooms, chambers for the magistrates and a new registry office. It will be designed so that we can expand it to six courtrooms in years ahead. I anticipate that it will be operating by about 2007.

The upgrade to the Bowen Court House is a \$3 million upgrade to improve its facilities. You may be aware that the Bowen Court House, like those in Maryborough and Mackay, is a heritage building. It was originally constructed as a government office building, so it was never constructed as a specific purpose court facility. It was built in 1880. The \$3 million upgrade in Bowen will refurbish that building. We are looking at construction commencing in about May next year, with completion about a similar time 12 months after that. The upgraded courthouse will include a larger courtroom for use as a higher court or a Magistrates Court, a smaller magistrates' courtroom, the usual judges' facilities, public waiting areas and registry improvements. Both of these courthouses—the northern districts one proposed at Petrie and the Bowen Court House—will include facilities for court support groups and, of course, closed-circuit TV and rooms for vulnerable witnesses.

The CHAIR: Attorney, I refer you to page 5-3 of the MPS and the reference to Legal Aid Queensland's development of a regional solicitor program which aims to increase the number of solicitors working in rural and regional Queensland law firms. Could you please explain this program to the committee?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. I am pleased to talk about this positive new initiative of Legal Aid Queensland. The initiative is a partnership between Legal Aid Queensland and private law firms in regional areas to increase access to quality legal aid services throughout the state. The regional solicitor program in fact addresses a shortage of private legal aid practitioners in regional and rural Queensland. In some areas it is difficult to obtain firms that have the capacity to provide legal aid services.

The program provides legal practice graduates with an opportunity to work as a solicitor in a regional law firm. The Legal Aid Office and the private law firm in the regional centre work together so that law graduates, once they complete their legal education and they have obtained admission as a solicitor, or at least finished the training requirements for admission, can be placed on a 12-month contract in the regional centre with the private law firm. Obviously this is only being done in regional centres where there are inadequate services already available from private law firms for legal aid consumers. It is an opportunity for young solicitors to make a real difference in a community and genuinely meets local needs.

The first placement under the program commenced work in May this year with a private law firm in Charleville in south-western Queensland. Applicants for the program have to be obviously prepared to work in any location within Queensland identified as needing additional practitioners to undertake legal aid matters. Legal Aid Queensland, if it accepts a graduate into the program, funds the cost of the practical legal training course as well as 75 per cent of the graduate's wage. So the graduate works in the private law firm. Their primary responsibility, obviously, is to serve all legal aid cases, under the supervision of the private firm, that come to the office. But beyond that their wage is funded 75 per cent by Legal Aid and they are available to do other work for the private firm. During their regional placement, the work of these graduates will span across a broad cross-section of law ranging from family law and other civil issues through to criminal matters.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, I refer you to page 2-6 of the MPS and in particular the work of the Electoral Commission. It has been a busy time for the commission over the last 12 months with state and local government elections. Could you please advise the committee of the cost of the elections and whether there were any difficulties in conducting the polls?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mrs Scott. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the recent state election went like clockwork. It is a credit to the Queensland Electoral Commission for its role in that. The Brisbane City Council elections, similarly, went very smoothly. The poll, which was the second in

which the Electoral Commission was fully computerised, with all 89 state returning officers supplied with a computer and laser printer for the duration of the 2004 election, worked very well. The cost of conducting the 2004 state election was \$10.2 million. This included \$1.9 million for an information and awareness campaign to the public. In addition to these costs the commission also distributed \$2.8 million in public funding to parties and candidates, achieving more than four per cent on the formal first preference vote. The public funding rate for this election was therefore \$1.32 per vote.

The Electoral Commission was also responsible for the conduct of the Brisbane City Council election this year. The cost of that election was \$1.9 million. The Brisbane City Council conducted its own advertising campaign, running its own call centre and utilising internal systems for processing results and publishing them on the Internet.

I am told by the Electoral Commission that there were no particular difficulties experienced in the conduct of either election. As is the case whenever elections are held during summer, there were some weather concerns, in particular the risk of flooding in regional parts of north Queensland. Fortunately, on this occasion all polling booths were open on 7 February and there were no reported difficulties with postal votes being dispatched or returned.

The new procedure for lodging candidates' how-to-vote cards seemed to work well and presented very few problems. The requirement applied to both state and Brisbane City Council elections. The availability of the cards for public inspection in the week prior to polling added a new level of transparency to the electoral process.

A report on the conduct of the Brisbane City Council election was prepared by the commission for the council, and the state election report will be tabled in the parliament in the near future. Both reports will be available on the commission's web site. They will also be conducting an evaluation of the conduct of the state election, examining the effectiveness of policies and procedures, as well as the need for any legislative changes to ensure the continued smooth operation of our electoral system. Again, I place on record my thanks to the Electoral Commission and the commissioner in particular for their excellent work in ensuring that we have a smooth-running democracy in our state.

Mr FRASER: Attorney, you made reference earlier to the comparative performance of our courts in Queensland. Could you detail to the committee how our courts stack up compared to other jurisdictions in Australia?

Mr WELFORD: As I mentioned earlier, the Commonwealth prepares a report on government services. It publishes it each year or so. It was published this year in January. It shows that not only are our courts operating efficiently but also they are cost-effective and indeed well ahead of national performance standards. The report is designed to provide an annual comparison of performance of courts across the country and an important barometer in measuring the effectiveness of our justice system. For the second year in a row our courts are setting the standard for other jurisdictions to follow. The rate at which our higher courts in particular—the Supreme and District courts and the Court of Appeal—are finalising criminal matters is better than any other jurisdiction in Australia. Our hardworking and busy Magistrates Court also continues to do a great job. This sort of performance I think is a credit to the justice system in our state.

There are, of course, occasional cases that experience delays, but overall the snapshot provided by the report shows a very positive picture. For example, the Court of Appeal finalised 99 per cent of all its criminal appeals within 12 months, against a national average of 83 per cent. The Supreme Court, trial division, finalised 74 per cent of criminal matters within 12 months, only just behind Victoria and Tasmania, where they probably do not have many trials anyhow. The national average was 70 per cent. Similarly, the District Court led all other states and territories in performing, by finalising 90 per cent of all its criminal matters within 12 months—well above the national average of 66 per cent for courts at that level.

The CHAIR: The time for government members questions has expired.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Attorney, you mentioned a couple of times the Maryborough courthouse in previous answers, and some of the issues were with it being a heritage style building. Obviously there are some difficulties—things like dispute resolution people sitting out on the veranda rather than being in an office. One concern is the shared waiting area where cases are heard. You can have warring parties and warring families all milling out on to the same deck. In light of the tactical response squad now being based in Maryborough, and that is operational and obviously will provide an ongoing group of customers, are there any plans to spend money in Maryborough? Are you saying by your previous answer that only Magistrates Court cases now will be seen in Maryborough?

Mr WELFORD: Oh, no. As you know, the Chief Justice relishes the opportunity on occasions to sit in the wonderful historic surrounds of the Maryborough courthouse. Of course, the courthouse itself has undergone some significant refurbishment in recent years. It is a magnificent facility, but you are right: because of its design, it is not like the new courthouses that provide separate rooms and facilities in the way they are now designed.

We have had this issue raised with us by the police, and my department is having ongoing discussions with both the Police Service and the Department of Public Works. In the next few months Public Works will do a further review of government accommodation in Maryborough. One of the things it will look at is how we might embellish the police and justice facilities in Maryborough to deal with some of those little niggling problems that particularly involve, for example, the management of potentially violent offenders who need to be brought to the courthouse and so forth.

We do not want—and it is not possible—to simply gut the courthouse and destroy its character, but I can give you the assurance that Public Works is about to conduct a review and that my department is working with them. We will do whatever we can to ensure that we have sufficient security and safe management of prisoners brought from the prison to court appearances.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Is closed circuit TV on the horizon?

Mr WELFORD: I think it is being looked at for the Maryborough Court House, yes.

Mr SPRINGBORG: My question to the Attorney-General relates to illegal street prostitution and the almost trebling of the number of cases coming before our courts in the last couple of years. I refer you to the chairman of the Prostitution Licensing Authority, Bill Carter, who indicates that some 90 per cent of those street prostitutes are on the street because they have a drug problem or it significantly contributes. Attorney, can you tell this committee what you are doing to ensure that those street prostitutes are diverted into some form of drug rehabilitation program?

One of the problems we have been having is finding out who is actually responsible for this because the buck keeps being passed backwards and forwards between you and the Police Minister over how many have been diverted and who is responsible for keeping the data and ensuring that there is some sort of rehabilitation program.

Mr WELFORD: I am not aware that anyone has been passing the buck, Mr Springborg, but the systems we have in place which I outlined earlier are the twin systems of a police diversion initiative, a court diversion initiative where people can be diverted to education and treatment for possession of minor amounts of drugs and the drug court, which also has the capacity to deal with people who can get rehabilitation.

The problem is that in all these instances, except for diversion, which is mandatory, the process of getting rehabilitation under the drug court is something that the person has to elect; they have to commit to it. If they are not prepared to volunteer and stick with it, then they simply get sentenced. As you point out, in many cases notwithstanding the array of sentencing options available to the courts now, none of those sentencing arrangements necessary tackle the root cause of the problem.

To the extent that street prostitutes are engaged in that activity to support and finance an addiction, then obviously it would be desirable for that to be dealt with. But it would come down to two things: first, whether they are also charged with any drug offences of a kind that would enable diversion either by police or by the court; and, secondly, in the case of more serious drug offences whether they are prepared to elect to enter the rehabilitation program. So in that sense the systems are already in place to provide support where the addiction is identified. It may well be, notwithstanding what the chair of the prostitution authority mentions, that these matters are not disclosed when stand-alone prostitution offences are brought before the court.

Mr SPRINGBORG: The simple reality is that these women are generally rotting in the gutter with a drug problem whilst we dillydally around working out whose responsibility it is to ensure some form of diversion, because they are going back before the courts. Attorney, I refer you to a question which we asked you on notice on 13 March last year. It was a very simple question. It basically said—

How many people have been found guilty of public soliciting offences? How many have been diverted into the drug court programs? How many have, as a condition of their release or bail, been required to undertake some form of drug rehabilitation?

In your response you said—

The matters referred to are offences under the Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act. The act is administered by the Hon. Tony McGrady, Minister for Police.

And you sent us off over there. We went off over there and he said to go back to you. We went through this one other estimates period—backwards and forwards as to who is responsible. I would have thought that you administered the drug court program, at least a fair bit. Who keeps this data, and do you have this data there for us?

Mr WELFORD: We would have the data on what people among the 450-odd that I mentioned before have been entered into the drug court program. We could, I suspect, identify which of the entrants to the drug court program, if any, were before the court on prostitution charges, and I will undertake to get that for you.

In relation to the statistics on prostitution charges under the police legislation, then the police would have those numbers. They may or may not have the numbers that are being diverted either by police diversion or otherwise—you would have to check—but in relation to the drug court I can give you

those figures. I cannot, however, give you the aggregate figures for prostitution charges subject to police diversion, for example, because they never get to court.

The CHAIR: Mr Springborg, do you want to place any questions on notice?

Mr SPRINGBORG: Well, I would really appreciate knowing—and I would have thought these are court records—how many people have been found guilty of public soliciting offences. I would have thought somebody should know that, how many have been diverted into the drug court program and how many have as a condition of their release or bail been required to undertake some form of drug rehabilitation. I would think we might be able to dig up those things. We have been going round in circles on this for the last 12 months or so and it is important that we gain access to that information.

The CHAIR: Minister, will you take those questions on notice?

Mr WELFORD: Absolutely. Let us see what we can find out in terms of the court data.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Thank you. With regards to the penalty enforcement processes in Queensland, pages 1-10 and 1-12 of the MPS, what sums were written off as unrecoverable by the civil enforcement systems in 2003-04, and what sums are anticipated to be unrecoverable in this current financial year?

Mr WELFORD: We do not totally write off anything. What I have done is put in place a system whereby amounts which have been outstanding for more than 10 years are, for accounting purposes, treated as 'written off'. However, if someone comes up with a current fine and the State Penalties Enforcement Register is referred that fine for collection and thereby find out the new address for the person, then even outstanding fines older than 10 years will still be pursued. Invariably what happens with people moving around is that agencies simply lose track of them. So, as I say, there is a notional writing off of any amounts that are more than 10 years old, but if we come across a new fine for a person that identifies their address and there are any old records of fines outstanding we still pursue them as well.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I have a two-part question further to SPER. What is the amount that is outstanding with regards to the SPER process—that is, fines that are outstanding—and what sum of money was recovered through the 347,000 fines finalised by SPER in this last financial year?

Mr WELFORD: Since it began, SPER, I think, has been an outstanding success, and it has recovered \$172.4 million. At the moment there are still being pursued fines totalling approximately \$213 million. They are current and past fines. That amount that is outstanding and still being pursued is gradually accumulating because you never collect every fine that is levied, but the acceleration in the effectiveness of recovery is dramatic. SPER is doing a great job using a range of measures—everything from the call centre through to literally doorknocking to recover fines.

In the last financial year, it received \$1.3 million in payments. There are 85,000 instalment plans worth about \$82.6 million in place. It collected \$15 million alone through centre pay deductions in the last year, and it organised 10,219 instalment plans in the last 12 months and recovered \$17 million in outstanding debts.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I would like to take the Attorney now to the issue of jury fees. I am sure that he, along with many of us, receive many complaints from people who are required to attend jury duty and maybe sit on juries for some time—days or weeks—about the impact of this on their life and their family's life and the fact that the fees are so low. As you know, these jury fees were last adjusted in 1997. Why have they not been adjusted since that time, and do you have any plans to adjust jury fees?

Mr WELFORD: Mr Springborg, while you were not in the committee I extensively answered this matter. The actual jury allowance was last increased in 1991. When the coalition assessed it in 1997, provision was made for an \$8 lunch allowance, which they took back off you if lunch was provided. As I announced to the committee earlier, jury fees are now to be increased from the start of next month to be amongst the highest jury fees in Australia. At a minimum they will be paid the minimum wage of \$90 a day, increasing to \$120 a day if a trial extends beyond 20 days. An average trial takes about three days and, based on the average trial, we are increasing the jurors' entitlements for those three days from \$153 to \$270—a 76 per cent increase. I am very pleased that I have been able to take this initiative. As I say, it will be approved by Governor in Council in the coming weeks with introduction next month.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Thank you, Mr Attorney, and thank you for edifying me on that particular matter. Mr Attorney, can I turn you to the issue of criminal injury compensation. I do not believe that has been touched on today. What is the sum of money paid by the Crown in respect of criminal injury compensation payments over each of the last three years? What is the sum that you have budgeted for in this current financial year?

Mr WELFORD: I can get you the exact figures if you want the precise figures, but I can tell you, in ballpark figures, that in the last three years the money paid out in criminal injury compensation has breached the \$20 million mark. It is a huge cost to government. In the last financial year we budgeted \$22.06 million. The figures are currently being finalised, but we estimate about \$23 million. That has

gradually increased from around \$20 million over the last three years. It is a substantial amount. There was a second part to your question.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Basically, how much do you expect to be paying out from—

Mr WELFORD: The budget, yes. The way we provide the funding for the Criminal Injury compensation Scheme is that we make an initial base allocation, usually somewhere between \$10 million and \$15 million. That is topped up at mid-year review, depending on how the payouts progress.

Mr SPRINGBORG: It indicates to me the ongoing nature of the complication of this issue to government, actually.

Mr WELFORD: It is a difficult issue, and there are issues around the three different systems for assessing and providing criminal injury compensation. It is something that I do want to have a look at.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Mr Attorney, as regards the Legal Aid Office, what are the number of complaints made by staff of the Legal Aid Office alleging discrimination, harassment or similar treatment by management over each of the last three years? What action has been taken in relation to the investigation of any complaints that may have been made? If these complaints have been made, how many remain unresolved?

The CHAIR: There are three questions in there, so the minister can treat them individually or answer them in one.

Mr WELFORD: I have three minutes; I will get as far as I can.

In terms of complaints over the last three years, as I understand it there are only currently complaints from two current members and one former staff member from the office. The complaints from the current staff members were originally made to the CMC. The CMC referred them back to the Board of Legal Aid Queensland. The board, of course, does not ordinarily have, as part of its management role, a separate investigative function, but it has now opted—after some uncertainty about whether the CMC could do it or not—to appoint an investigator to look into the complaints and to make an assessment. The board will then be able to make a decision and report the outcome of its decision on the complaints to the CMC.

The matter you may be concerned about is the delay in addressing complaints that have arisen from these complainants. It is true that they have been outstanding for some time because of the hiatus between the CMC and the board about what was the most appropriate way for the investigation to proceed. But I am pleased to say that I now anticipate that should be resolved by about August or September this year. That is not just the issue of who investigates, because the board has now appointed an investigator. I am hopeful that the complaints will be cleaned up and resolved by September.

The CHAIR: The time block for non-government members has expired. I call the member for Redlands.

Mr ENGLISH: I refer the Attorney to page 1-4 of the MPS and the reference to additional funding for the State Reporting Bureau to implement new systems. Could the Attorney outline what is planned and how this will improve the effectiveness of the justice system?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr English. The provision of reporting services is, needless to say, a fundamental part of the operation of the court system. The State Reporting Bureau provides recording and transcription services for numerous courts, tribunals and commissions of inquiry across the state. Needless to say, as I mentioned, it is a significant part of the efficiency of the justice system, and I think it is a matter which is often underestimated and overlooked as a key part of the system.

Over the years the State Reporting Bureau has worked out of less than adequate facilities and struggled with old equipment, so we are now investing an additional \$6.5 million over the next two years to bring the State Reporting Bureau into the digital age. The latest state-of-the-art digital audio and video recording, transcription and storage facilities will be introduced. All of our 111 courthouses and 263 courtrooms across the state will benefit from this technology. The project will establish a computer in each courtroom so as to provide a four-channel digital recording of proceedings.

In the first phase of the project, digital recording facilities will be installed at the new Brisbane Magistrates Court, Roma Street, and the Brisbane Law Courts complex, that is, the higher courts. The new technology will be operational in the new Magistrates Court when it opens in about November this year. In the second phase of the project we will be installing the new technology in the remaining Supreme and District courts, in the circuit and regional courts, in the Magistrates Courts regionally, in the Industrial Court and in the Industrial Commission in Brisbane.

In time my plan is to see us have the capability for electronic distribution of transcripts, a means of court monitoring that reduces travel requirements and associated costs for court staff, the capacity to provide online public access to transcripts and a modernisation of the justice system by allowing transcripts to be distributed electronically to, for example, the Office of the DPP and other justice

agencies. This will be an important initiative and will significantly improve the efficiency of the reporting of court proceedings.

Mr FRASER: Attorney, at page 1-4 of the MPS reference is made to additional funds for the Office of the Adult Guardian and the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal. Can you outline to the committee how these funds will be utilised?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. The government is obviously acutely aware of the growing population in south-east Queensland particularly, but the whole state is affected. That population is also ageing comparatively, so there is going to be an increasing need for services to protect people with impairment. The trends in our population are reflected in a steadily growing number of guardianship applications and appointments of guardian.

The legislation was introduced by our government under the Guardianship and Administration Act in 2000. This established the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal and defined the statutory role of the Adult Guardian. Both the Adult Guardian and the tribunal play an integral part in what we call the substituted decision making legal framework in our state. Since the tribunal commenced its operations, there has been an average increase in the number of applications registered of 16.5 per cent every year. You can see that there has been an explosion in demand from people in relation to the safe management of the health and financial affairs of people who are impaired and do not have legal capacity themselves.

There has been a corresponding increase in the number of matters heard. For example, in 2003-04 the number of applications registered was more than 5,000. This represented an increase of approximately 38 per cent on the previous year. Similarly, the Adult Guardian acted as guardian for 621 adults in the last financial year. This was an increase of nearly 30 per cent in the number of people under the care of the Adult Guardian. We will not be surprised, frankly, if this increase continues. We have budgeted, as you will see in the MPS, for another 22 per cent increase in the coming financial year.

We have acknowledged this increasing workload by additional funding of \$2.1 million over the next four years to provide for increased capacity, both in the Office of the Adult Guardian and in the tribunal. This will enable the Adult Guardian to appoint four additional permanent guardianship officers. Obviously that will help reduce the workload for each officer and ensure that an effective service is delivered. It will also allow the tribunal to employ additional permanent officers to assist the tribunal in conducting hearings in Brisbane and regional Queensland at their current level. I am sure both the tribunal and the Office of the Adult Guardian will continue to provide a high level of service. I would like to take this opportunity publicly to thank both the tribunal chair and the Adult Guardian for their highly dedicated work in a very difficult area.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, on page 1-10 of the MPS reference is made to dispute resolution. Could you please outline the availability of the service, both to the courts and to everyday Queenslanders?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. The Dispute Resolution Branch in my department was established in 1990, when it was then called the Community Justice Program. It provides mediation between warring neighbours, in effect. Today its expanded services also mediate disputes in many different contexts—workplace disputes, family disputes, environmental conflicts and indeed some minor commercial disputes. This mediation process allows the parties to maintain a measure of ownership of the conflict, which they then can be helped to resolve. Mediators do not tell people what they should or should not do; they simply try to help them communicate more effectively and negotiate solutions that are mutually acceptable.

We have dispute resolution centres in a number of regional areas across the state. They are free and provide the community with a readily accessible and prompt service to help them resolve local neighbourhood disputes. We have centres in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay and south-east Queensland. Panels of the community mediators have also been established in Toowoomba, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Bundaberg, Emerald and Mount Isa. The branch also provides assistance to our courts through the Magistrates Court in minor debt matters and small claims matters.

They have established a process called abbreviated mediation. It is available prior to people appearing in the courts. This shortened mediation process has been very successful, resolving more than 50 per cent of all matters. That has significantly reduced the workload on our courts and tribunals as well.

It receives referrals from a significant number of court ordered mediations from the Magistrates Court under the Rules of Court. These mediations often include legal representatives being involved. They have a success rate of about 65 per cent, again reducing the need for court proceedings. As well as providing assistance to the courts, the dispute resolution centres receive a large number of referrals from other government bodies, for example the Queensland police, a variety of state government departments and many local governments as well. The centres have also offered to help manage some

school based conflicts. I know a number of schools now have within their schools programs where students themselves operate conflict resolution programs. In the last year the Dispute Resolution Branch completed 2,042 mediations and achieved an agreement rate of 83 per cent.

Mr ENGLISH: On page 1-10 of the MPS there is reference to the civil case register system. Could you please advise the committee of the courts at which this e-lodgment is available and the benefits of the system?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. The introduction of electronic lodgment or e-lodgment is another example of how we are gradually introducing technology into the court system. I am a strong advocate of the improvement in our court technology, as are the heads of our courts. The facility enables solicitors, agents and parties, particularly plaintiffs, to electronically lodge documents at selected Magistrates Court civil registries. It includes the ability to electronically initiate court proceedings for a civil debt claim and request a default judgment from the court registrar.

The electronic lodgment of these documents feeds into the civil case register system. This is the system that stores the details of the parties, the documents and the court events as the matter progresses through the Magistrates Court. For those parties who wish to lodge their documents manually at the registry, staff in the registry will log that into the system on their behalf. Electronic lodgment facilities are currently available in 19 locations. Many people are probably unaware of this. It includes the Brisbane central court complex and the Beenleigh, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Townsville and Southport courts.

Electronic lodgment provides a range of benefits not just to clients but also to the courts. Clients, of course, spend less time attending the registries physically and waiting to be served and for their documents to be processed. Under the e-lodgment scheme they simply submit the e-lodgment and receive a response electronically within a few minutes. Clients can also lodge a claim at the registry outside their local area which eliminates the time that the claim would have previously spent being posted from one registry to another.

Clients can use the e-lodgment service between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. every weekday so that documents can obviously be lodged well outside normal office hours. As more people choose to take advantage of this service, I think we will see less people physically having to spend time at the registry reducing waiting lists for clients of lawyers who otherwise would need to lodge in person.

The courts also benefit through the reduction in the time spent processing hard copy documents. For example, in Beenleigh they have received 713 claims electronically since the e-lodgment service was introduced in July last year. That is 33 per cent of the total number of claims lodged in the Beenleigh Magistrates Court for that period. As this new technology is rolled out I am sure we will see many other benefits of the more efficient system.

The CHAIR: I refer the Attorney to page 1-10 of the MPS and the reference to the commencement of the Office of State Coroner. Could the Attorney provide an indication to the committee of the difference the new Coroners Act and this new office are making to the state's coronial system?

Mr WELFORD: Again, Chair, one of my significant reforms since taking on the responsibility as Attorney-General has been the overhaul of the Coroners Act and the establishment of the new Office of State Coroner. We now have a new system with a much stronger emphasis on preventing deaths and a more sensitive and compassionate approach to families who are grieving at the loss of loved ones.

There is now a focus on identifying emerging patterns also and all of our coroners now have powers to recommend changes to prevent future deaths. The new system also ensures that there is consistency in the investigation of deaths in care and deaths in custody. These matters now require a mandatory investigation by the State Coroner or Deputy State Coroner.

To reduce the number of deaths unnecessarily reported, as was the case previously, the new system no longer requires a death to be reported to the State Coroner where the person has simply not consulted a doctor within the last three months prior to death. Previously that was a criteria for automatic referral to the coroner. Similarly, where a doctor certifies that the death is from natural cause, again that does not necessarily become a reportable death unless there are other circumstances as set out in the new Coroners Act.

Another reform is the removal of the power to commit for trial. This means that if a coroner considers an offence has been committed, instead of automatically committing the person for trial, the coroner must refer the matter to the Office of the DPP or other relevant disciplinary body for charges to be progressed based on evidence that the coroner has uncovered.

The State Coroners Office is also now linked in to the National Coroners Information System, which records interstate information and recommendations as well. This system will help our coroners in identifying relevant trends and provide valuable insights into what is being done in other jurisdictions to prevent similar deaths that occur.

The new act also supports the needs of families by allowing coroners to take into account family concerns, as well as cultural and spiritual beliefs that might affect how autopsies are conducted, and by allowing the family to have a say in the retention of the organs of a person on whom an autopsy has been undertaken.

Guidelines have been issued by the State Coroner to ensure greater consistency in the way the coronial system operates across the state, including who should conduct autopsies in particular types of deaths. Overall, I think the new coronial system is going to deliver much more compassionate, responsive and indeed efficient coronial services for our state.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: With reference to the JPs in the Community program, could you please outline to the committee how the program works and the benefits to the community?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, yet another new initiative introduced by me and the current government expanding the access of people in the Queensland community to justice and legal assistance. As you know, many people when they suddenly require the need of a JP can never find one, notwithstanding the fact that there are more than 60,000 of them registered in Queensland—more than any other state, and in fact more than most other states combined. So last year I took the first step of establishing an Internet directory so JPs who are prepared to have basic contact information on the Internet are now able to be shown according to the suburb where they are available and there is a list of contact numbers. Then more recently, just last year, I set up a number of Magistrates Courts as a base for volunteer JP services to be delivered. This year I have launched a third phase of this expanded accessibility to JPs across the state. I call it the JPs in the Community initiative. It is a partnership between my department in the government and local shopping centres as well as local JPs.

On 23 March this year, I was pleased to launch the program at the Westfield Chermside Shopping Centre on Brisbane's north side. The program aims to make services provided by JPs and commissioners for declarations more accessible to the public at a number of locations. Chermside initially commenced with volunteers on Monday and Wednesday between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. with a pool of local JPs. Since March that number has increased from about seven initially when I launched the service to 22 volunteers now. So there has been a wonderful response, a very positive and pleasing response from local volunteer JPs in the area to help out at Chermside. As a result, we have been able to expand the service to Friday as well. They are witnessing about 23 documents a day, so they are getting a steady stream of people asking about the service.

More recently, only a couple of weeks ago, I went over to Westfield Carindale and did it all over again with a new group of local JPs who again will start off two days a week witnessing affidavits and statutory declarations. In the coming months we will be having discussions with a view to establishing a similar facility at Westfield Garden City, and obviously in the weeks and months ahead we will be having discussions with facilities in other regional areas throughout the state so that we can expand this wonderful new service to communities right across our state.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Attorney, I refer you to Capital Acquisitions, pages 1-36 and 1-37. You are well aware of the concerns that relate to the condition of the Brisbane District and Supreme courts. What provision is being made for upgrade and/or replacement of those courts?

Mr WELFORD: That is a very timely question, Mr Springborg, because, as you know, we are getting in place the new Magistrates Court, which will be a magnificent facility. In the meantime, our District and Supreme Court judges are sitting in a facility on the other side of George Street which, one must confess, is a pretty old facility, especially the District Court section, which is about 30 years old now.

I have done a couple of things in the last 12 months to start to move on this. Firstly, we have invested some significant dollars—I think over a million dollars—in refurbishments in this court complex, particularly in the District Court, and that is providing some relief to judicial officers and staff in the District Court facility. We have done quite a bit of painting and we are continuing to do some further refurbishments in the building. In the meantime, I have asked my department to commence some preliminary planning on options for a new facility or upgrading the existing one—although I suspect in the end it might be just as cost-effective to build a new one either on the existing site or elsewhere. So the preliminary planning has already commenced.

Obviously, I imagine the Treasurer would want me to finish off the existing building before he starts handing me out big licks of money for another one. But obviously that planning has to commence because, although the current building is structurally very sound, its layout, its serviceability, as I say particularly in the District Court section, is now very dated and we are looking to the future and the needs of the District and Supreme courts. There are a couple of District Court judges who currently cannot be accommodated in the District Court and they are in separate facilities down in Tank Street where the Land Court used to operate.

Mr SPRINGBORG: My next question relates to the Electoral Commission of Queensland, page 2-6. Attorney, how many of the 205,577 enrolled electors who did not vote at the state election are going to be prosecuted on best estimates to date?

Mr WELFORD: In terms of the decision about prosecuting—

Mr SPRINGBORG: Fined.

Mr WELFORD: Yes. My understanding is that the process is that the commission may have received communications from a number of those people already with explanations as to why they were not in the state or otherwise unable to vote. Some of those explanations will be accepted, obviously. Notices will be sent to most of the others, and some of those may result in a fine. My advice is we have had notices go out to I think about 110,000 and of those, once the explanations all come in, usually fines are handed out to around about 25,000. So about one in four end up being fined for I suppose what is an inadequate explanation for not voting.

Mr SPRINGBORG: That would be one in eight, would it not?

Mr WELFORD: One in eight of the total, one in four of the number who get notices.

Mr SPRINGBORG: That is why you have an estimate there on page 2-15. You are anticipating that only \$400,000 or approximately \$2 per non-voter—total non-voters—will be received in taxes, fees and fines.

Mr WELFORD: Of the total number of non-voters it seems like a small amount but that is because a large portion of the non-voters do ultimately give a reasonable explanation for their inability to vote. But, as I say, there is still a fair number—25,000 odd each round—who end up paying fines.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government questions has expired and this brings the committee's examination of the estimates of the Attorney-General and Justice portfolio to a close. Mr Attorney, on behalf of the committee I thank you and your advisers for assisting us here today. The committee will break till 2 p.m. and then resume to examine the estimates of the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services.

Mr WELFORD: Madam Chair, just before you close, if I may, I have some information in relation to a question raised by the Leader of the Opposition. The information relates to the number of offences acted upon under the Prostitution Act and the Vagrants Gaming and Other Offences Act for prostitution. The numbers are as follows: the number of convictions in 2001-02 was 325, the number of convictions in 2002-03 was 723, and up to 31 March this year, in the last financial year, 604. I can update that figure down the track, obviously. Of those, one in each year so far has been a juvenile.

Mr SPRINGBORG: One in each year?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, only one in each year. There is no current database, unfortunately, and the matter you raise may be something we can look at, which indicates which of the options that you raised might have been exercised. In the absence of it being part of the sentencing penalty, there is no record kept of referrals, for example, to treatment or detox programs. We just do not have that data and they are ordinarily not part of a sentencing order.

We are looking at a new system which has been trialled in southern states called Credit which allows certain orders to be made as part of a bail hearing, but that is yet to be fully introduced. I am not aware of any common practice currently for bail orders to include conditions relating to referral to drug treatment because, of course, at that stage the person is still presumed innocent.

Sitting suspended from 1.03 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B—POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES

In Attendance

Hon. J.C. Spence, Minister for Police and Corrective Services

Queensland Police Service

Mr B. Atkinson, Commissioner

Mr D. Condor, Deputy Commissioner

Mr B. Moy, Principal Policy Officer

Mr J. Just, Deputy Chief Executive (Resource Management)

Mr P. Brown, Director, Finance

Department of Corrective Services

Mr F. Rockett, Director-General

Ms G. Sinclair, Executive Director, Policy and Program Services

Ms F. Rafter, Manager, Women's Services

Mr A. Evans, Principal Finance Officer

The CHAIR: The hearing is now resumed. I welcome the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and her advisers. I would like to introduce my committee. They are: Deputy Chair, Mike Horan, the member for Toowoomba South; Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge; Andrew Fraser, the member for Mount Coot-tha; John English, the member for Redlands; Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin; and Chris Foley, the member for Maryborough.

The proceedings today are governed by the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. Members of the public are reminded that they cannot participate in the proceedings and may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. In accordance with the sessional orders, at least half the time for questions at today's hearing will be allotted to non-government members. The time limit for questions is one minute, and three minutes for answers. A warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner.

For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers to please identify themselves before answering questions. I ask everyone in the chamber to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off during the hearing. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services open for examination. The committee will begin by examining estimates for the Department of Police. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you have five minutes to make an opening statement.

Ms SPENCE: Thank you very much. This budget delivers on the Beattie government's election commitment to make the crime fighting capacity of the Queensland Police Service even stronger and to ensure that our correctional facilities remain amongst the most secure in the world. Our commitment to being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime is reflected in the record policing budget of \$1.094 billion, an increase of \$93 million, or 9.2 per cent on last year. It demonstrates our commitment to ensuring the safety and security of the Queensland community and to continuing the downward trend in offences against people and property.

There is a clear emphasis on young people. In line with our election commitment, there will be eight new school based police officers and eight new police beats this year. Under another initiative, Queensland Police will be better able to divert children and young people from the criminal justice system with the creation of an extra 50 Juvenile Aid Bureau positions in this budget.

The new JAB officers will be specifically trained to deal with children who have committed offences or who have been offended against, boosting the bureau's strength statewide from 356 to 406 officers. The new JAB officers will also be trained to provide a 24-hour, seven-day a week response to child protection issues, working with staff from the Department of Child Safety and non-government agencies across the state. In addition, 16 positions are being created for senior experienced child protection investigators working with SCAN teams under a new system, providing expert overview of local case management issues.

A new Child Safety Unit will be created within the Queensland Police Service with a detective superintendent as its director to coordinate and support child protection and safety. All 66 positions are new, coming on top of the Beattie government's commitment to increasing police numbers by about 300 a year, exceeding our target of 9,100 police officers by September 2005.

The Queensland government will spend \$2.4 million over the next four years to make Queensland Police's Counter Terrorism Coordination Unit a permanent weapon in the fight against terrorism. It will cost \$600,000 a year to maintain this unit which will be involved in security planning and coordination to ensure Queensland's counter-terrorism responses are world class. The Queensland Police Service's general crime fighting capacity will be strengthened with \$2.6 million in new funding for the purchase of a bigger replacement aircraft.

The Beattie government is providing unprecedented support to Queensland Police for a range of strategies to prevent and fight crime. For instance, in the area of new technology 15 live scan systems, which use computer and laser technology to scan fingerprints, will be purchased at a cost of almost \$5 million in 2004-05. They will go to police establishments across the state that process more than 1,000 sets of fingerprints a year.

Our commitment to the highest security standards has ensured the continuation of this government's record of no escapes from secure custody. The budget will provide an extra \$10 million in the next financial year to further strengthen Queensland prison security as the first instalment in a \$37.2 million five-year program. These latest measures to manage high security prisoners builds on the \$475 million six-year capital works renewal and development program which was completed as a result of the last budget.

This year's expenditure includes \$6 million for perimeter security upgrades. Today, I unveiled the first of nine new perimeter protection vehicles, PPVs, for the state's correctional facilities. The PPVs will replace the unreliable Hummers introduced by the Borbidge government. The other \$4 million is to protect security systems and ensure staff safety. The capital funding boost for security in the 2004-05 budget demonstrates the Beattie government's commitment to continue enhancing community and staff safety.

I would now like to introduce the people at the table with me. On my right is Commissioner Bob Atkinson; next to him is Deputy Commissioner Dick Conder; on my left is Principal Policy Advisor, Bruce Moy; next to Bruce is Deputy Chief Executive of Resource Management, John Just; and next to him is Director of Finance, Paul Brown. We are ready to answer questions.

The CHAIR: The first round of questions will be from non-government members.

Mr HORAN: I give the apologies of Mr Vaughan Johnson, the shadow minister for police. He was asked to give the eulogy for Sir James Walker in Longreach. Being a close family friend and true westerner, he wanted to be there. I am filling in for him.

Ms SPENCE: I am sure you will do a good job.

Mr HORAN: I will try. My first question to you relates to the changes to the Queensland Police Service's performance indicators. About one-third of the 108 indicators have been removed. The only real opportunity for proper scrutiny of the appropriations for this department is through the MPS. The removal of some 37 indicators from the MPS will limit the ability of this committee to examine the efficiency of the spending of taxpayers' money on the Police Services. Some of the indicators taken out include unreported offences in sexual assault and victimisation rates for the likes of break and enter, motor vehicle theft and sexual assault. Under the heading of 'Quantity' things like the number of breath tests conducted, the number of life endangering offences detected, the number of drink-driving measures detected have been removed. Under the heading 'Measures' the number of crashes resulting in persons being hospitalised has been removed. It is very concerning that these have been taken out. It limits the ability of this estimates committee to examine the spending, the targets set and whether targets are being achieved.

Ms SPENCE: The new performance indicators are a result of the service's new strategic plan. It was felt by the service that the performance indicators under these new outputs better reflect and are better aligned to the strategic plan of the department. I accept your point that some statistics are no longer being reported in the MPS, particularly the crime statistics to which you just referred. I do see that as a problem because they are clearly outlined every year in the department's statistical review. If any member of the public wants to see those crime statistics or data on the performance of the Police Service, they are reported every year in its statistical review document. They do not necessarily fit with budgetary items, but I am happy to answer questions on those areas. I am sure the police are if you care to ask them.

Mr HORAN: I would like to go over that point again. There has been a lot of concern about government accountability and FOIs being carted off through the cabinet process. One of the few things we have left is the estimates committee system. I think it is fairly serious when some 37 out of 108 performance indicators have now been taken out of the MPS that this committee examines. It is all right to say that it is in the statistical review which I think is tabled in parliament later in the year. For this committee's public examination of how much money will be spent and whether for that increased spending targets are being set and targets being met, taking those 37 very important indicators out of the MPS downgrades the process.

The CHAIR: Would you mind asking the question.

Mr HORAN: It was really a comment, as you rightly picked. I want the minister to further add to her answer. This committee is no longer able to discuss a lot of those indicators because they will no longer be there in the MPS.

Ms SPENCE: I am happy to continue talking about this issue. I agree with Mr Horan that this is a very important process in terms of the accountability of departments. There is no disagreement on that issue. The police have a lot more data in their MPS outputs than many government departments. But I stand by the basic fact that all of this data is provided annually in the statistical review. It is not as though the police or the government are trying to hide any of these statistics about crime, clear-up rates or the efficiency of the Queensland Police Service. We are here for the next few hours to answer any questions that you might like to put to us.

Mr HORAN: Whilst you say the data and statistics are available, targets will not be set. My next question relates to targets. I refer to page 1-17 dot point three under Future Developments which mentions an additional 372 police positions being funded this year, assisting the government to meet its target of 9,150 police officers by 2005. Meeting the target for additional police is good, but how is this improving clear-up rates, for example, for unlawful entry into people's homes? The annual statistical review shows that only 14 per cent of these crimes were cleared in 2002-03. The clear-up rates on the Gold Coast and Redcliffe were eight to nine per cent and not even one in five unlawful entries were cleared on the Sunshine Coast and Townsville. Will you set a target to endeavour to improve the clear-up rate for these unlawful entries into people's home.

Ms SPENCE: The police do maintain target clear-up rates for all manner of crimes. In fact, I had the privilege yesterday of sitting in on one of the operational performance review sessions that the commissioner runs regularly with each police region. On a region by region basis the police officer set targets themselves and they are quizzed on their performance in reaching those targets by the commissioner at least twice a year.

This is a process that the commissioner put in place that is being copied by other states in Australia. Yesterday we had people from all states of Australia sitting in on the operational performance review to see how Queensland does it. Treasury have taken a lot of interest in this. It is looking at putting this process in place in other government departments. I will ask the commissioner to further expand on target setting for the police.

Comr Atkinson: Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I do not believe in setting arbitrary percentage figures per se. So I do believe that we should say that this year statewide we will reduce break and enters by a certain percentage and increase clear up. I think history shows, during previous regimes, that that is a flawed approach and can lead to the manipulation of figures and poor quality policing. I am going back to the 1970s and early 1980s. The police will tend or can focus on arresting young people for very minor things and prosecuting young people for very minor things. What we should be about is quality.

The operational performance review process, though, is based on the concept of always endeavouring to reduce reported crime and increase the clear-up rates. It has been in existence now for three years. In the first year—if I could just take this on notice—my recollection is that break and enters throughout Queensland were reduced by nine per cent; in the second year, six per cent; and this year, although the statistical year has only just concluded, as at 30 June there has been a further reduction in the reported rate of break and enters. The clear-up rate indeed is lower than I would like it to be. That is a common theme throughout Australia. For five years in a row here in Queensland the clear-up rate was 13 per cent, 13 per cent, 12 per cent, 13 per cent and 13 per cent. This year we think we have got it up to 14 per cent or 15 per cent. We have not got the final figures in yet. One of the aspects of that of course is repeat offenders. It is a fact that we often catch people who may be responsible for quite a number of offences, but we only have the evidence to support charges in relation to a smaller number than those they are responsible for.

Mr HORAN: Thankyou, Commissioner. Minister, you said that the police on a region by region basis are quizzed by the commissioner and set targets. What I am on about is that this is a committee of the parliament and I am asking you as the minister about targets and how the budget is spent. Many of the people in Queensland whom we represent would be saying, 'We have unlawful entry into people's homes sitting at 14 per cent'—if it sits at that level, and the commissioner has mentioned other states as 13 per cent, 12 per cent and so forth—'yet we're getting about 320 to 350 to 370 extra police per year.' They would understand that part of that would be to deal with the increasing population of the state. Surely part of it would be to task people to areas so that important crimes in people's minds—like unlawful entry into their homes—can have a higher rate of clear up. Why aren't we getting a higher rate of clear up? Why aren't you prepared to set a target for this committee to examine?

Ms SPENCE: The reality is that the people of Queensland should be pleased that there has been a decrease in a number of significant offences in the last 12 months: prostitution offences down by 13 per cent; Weapons Act offences down by 10 per cent; homicide down by 15 per cent; unlawful entry, which you were just referring to, down by seven per cent; other theft offences down by seven per cent; traffic and related offences down by one per cent; unlawful use of motor vehicles down by 14 per cent;

and fraud offences down by nine per cent. Have there been increases in some areas? Yes, there have. Have there been increase in the police clear-up rates of those crimes? Yes, there have. All of that information is clearly detailed in the statistical review each year. So there is no cover-up of the crimes that are committed in Queensland or the police performance in solving those crimes. I think that our Police Service in this state is one of the most open organisations in terms of its reporting and its accountability that we would see in any state in Australia or indeed any agency in this government. There is no attempt by this service to cover up any of these statistics. It is ready to report on them, and it does so annually. It is ready to discuss them at any time.

Mr HORAN: I just want to reiterate the point that this committee is examining this area. We want to see targets, and that targets are being met. I think targets are a fair thing to have.

The CHAIR: Order! I just ask the member to move on to the next question. You are just repeating the same question that you have been asking.

Mr HORAN: Yes, I am but—

Mr ENGLISH: Also I take offence with you speaking on my behalf. The committee may not feel that if the member does.

Mr HORAN: This part of the committee does feel that there should be targets so that we can see whether they have been able to be achieved or not.

The CHAIR: Would you like to ask the next question?

Mr HORAN: Yes. Thanks, Madam Chair. The next question relates to the John Tonge Centre and the backlog. I think that in the previous question on notice in May it indicated that the backlog in the previous month to May was 13,643 cases. Minister, I note that there is \$5 million through the Health Department this year as an increase to John Tonge and then in this budget for the Police there is \$3 million for two years time and another \$3 million for three years time. Minister, can you tell us how that \$5 million and the two lots of \$3 million from the Police budget will be spent? Can you provide us with any guarantee that it is going to get rid of this backlog of 13,643 cases and deal with the number of cases that would be coming through?

Ms SPENCE: I have recently visited the John Tonge Centre and spoken with police and other staff at the centre. I would encourage any member of parliament who wishes to visit John Tonge to let me or the Health Minister know and we will organise a visit for you. It is an incredible place where hundreds of scientists are employed to do this forensic work. As you have rightly said, we have had a problem with a backlog in the John Tonge Centre. That has been well canvassed publicly for some time. The government recognises that, and that is why we have allocated additional money—\$5 million, a significant amount of money—to clear up that backlog. Let us be frank about this: it is not going to happen overnight. We have very highly skilled and qualified people who are employed and required to do this work at the John Tonge Centre. They are mostly scientists. They are now attempting to employ more staff to help them with this backlog.

I understand that they are also looking at outsourcing some of the work to an accredited agency in a southern state. They are also in discussions—it is not just the Police but also Queensland Health—with other potential private providers for the future. But, yes, we have a problem. It has been well canvassed. Yes, we have acknowledged that problem, and that is why we have allocated \$5 million to employ more people so that we can do more testing at John Tonge. But I have to make the point that I am told that there is no backlog in criminal cases, that they are given priority at the John Tonge Centre. Testing that is required for court cases generally proceeds on time, and those cases are given priority.

Mr HORAN: Minister, in terms of the counter-terrorism unit you said that they had \$600,000 to operate on. I think the Premier's Department has probably three, four or five times as much money as that per year to operate its section of counter-terrorism. Can you tell this committee how that \$600,000 will be allocated and spent during the year? Is there any move by that counter-terrorism unit to be able to get access to telephone tapping powers to assist them in their work?

Ms SPENCE: The unit currently comprises six police officers and one civilian. This includes two inspectors, one senior sergeant, two acting senior sergeants, one sergeant and one administration officer. Each of these positions will continue beyond the initial 18-month period which the unit was set up for. They have now been assured of permanent funding for the future. It is a very important unit to discover intelligence on terrorism related activities within Queensland and overseas and indeed nationally. I am told that there is no evidence at this point in time that Queensland has ever been a target for terrorism, but we cannot take that lightly and that is not to say that we will not be in the future. That is why we believe it is important to maintain a counter-terrorism coordination unit of this nature. It shares its intelligence with police in other states and overseas. It is very important in the national framework.

In terms of police phone tapping powers, it is an issue that this government has considered in the past but has not yet implemented. But it is something that we will continue to consider in the future. The Premier has asked me and the Police Service to prepare a submission for cabinet's consideration, and that will occur. It will be up to cabinet to make the decision of whether we want to go down the track of

giving the CMC and the police those sorts of powers. Queensland police though do have the capacity to work with the Federal Police, which does have phone tapping powers. So in joint operations they have made use of those phone tapping capabilities in solving crime in Queensland.

Mr HORAN: Minister, the funding for equipment I presume comes out of the budget for plant and equipment which is detailed on page 1-41 of the MPS. The total budgeted figure for 2004-05 for plant and equipment is \$51.989 million, which is \$5.2 million less than what was actually spent in 2003-04. Given that there is an additional 372 police positions funded for this forthcoming year, which is 75 positions more than was budgeted for in the previous year, can you explain why there is an estimated reduction in funding for this year for plant and equipment even though we have more police positions?

Ms SPENCE: In terms of the plant and equipment budget, fundamentally were you referring to the \$49 million and the—

Mr HORAN: I was referring to the fact that the budgeted figure for 2004-05 is \$51.9 million, which is \$5.2 million less than what was actually spent the previous year on that item. There is another 372 police positions to be funded in 2004-05. So you have got nearly 400 more police and about \$5.2 million less being spent on plant and equipment.

Ms SPENCE: There is a good answer for that, and it involves information technology. I might just ask John Just, who is in charge of research management, to explain how that has come about.

Mr Just: The increase from the 2003-04 budget to the 2003-04 estimated actual is due to deferrals from the previous year and also the allocation of budget resources during the year 2003-04. So as we progress through 2003-04 we have spare capacity to put into plant and equipment through the year. As the finance committee meet, the finance committee would make the decision to allocate more funding to plant and equipment as the need arose and as funding became available. It is our anticipation that during the year 2004-05 we will have that same spare capacity. We will have deferrals from 2003-04 as well. By the time we get through the year 2004-05, the funding resource for plant and equipment should at least be or be more than we spent the year before. The true comparison for the Police Service at the moment is budget to budget, which is \$49.8 million to \$51.9 million. As the year progresses, the finance committee will meet and allocate additional resources to plant and equipment as the need arises. But this is just the early cut of the allocation for plant and equipment.

The CHAIR: The time for questions from non-government members has expired.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, I refer to the government's target of 9,100 police officers in Queensland by September 2005. Will this target be met?

Ms SPENCE: It certainly will be met. In fact, it will be exceeded. At this point in time, Queensland has exceeded the national police to population ratio. The Labor Party went to the election on the commitment that we will always maintain our police numbers above the national average. The much-talked about figure of achieving 9,100 sworn police officers by September 2005 will be exceeded, because we will put on additional Juvenile Aid Bureau positions in the next 12 months. So we expect to far exceed 9,150. By increasing the police numbers over the last few years, we have been able to provide more police in every region of the state. For example, in the Far North region since the Beattie government was elected we have gone from 467 to 578 officers already. The Northern region has gone from 477 to 611 officers. The Central region has gone from 557 to 693 officers. The North Coast region has gone from 805 to 1,118 officers. The Southern region has gone from 643 to 847 officers. The South East region has gone from 898 to 1,189 officers. The Metro North region has gone from 886 to 1,049 officers. The Metro South region—my own region—has gone from 744 to 945 officers. There are another 1,600 police based in south-east Queensland who are not counted in those regional police numbers. This includes specialists in areas such as crime operations, criminal intelligence, forensics and the traffic branch. The Queensland Police Service has established a post-2005 Police Resourcing Steering Committee which is tasked with developing a detailed plan to achieve the government's commitments with regard to police numbers.

Aside from police and civilian staffing levels, the plan will also examine the supporting infrastructure, assets and operating funding required by the Queensland Police Service in the future. The plan will be drafted for consideration by the government by the end of this year and it will take effect from 1 July 2005.

Mr FRASER: In that answer you touched on extra staff for the Juvenile Aid Bureau. Can you outline to the committee what these staff will be doing and where they will be located?

Ms SPENCE: Yes, I can. As I said, the new juvenile aid officers will be specifically trained to deal with children who have either committed offences or been offended against, boosting the bureau's statewide strength from 356 to 406. I think that we have police in this state who are very mindful of the needs of children and who are very professional in their dealing with juveniles in all manners.

The new juvenile aid officers will also be trained to provide a 24-hour, seven-day a week response to child protection issues. They will work with the staff from the Department of Child Safety and non-government agencies across the state. We all know that the notifications of child abuse and

neglect have increased in the past few years so this extra strength will assist the police to work with the Department of Child Safety to identify and prosecute the perpetrators.

This is a first instalment. We think that we will need to further increase the number of juvenile aid officers next year and those decisions will be made in the next 12 months on the basis of workload and need. But besides those 50 officers, I think that it is very important to also talk about the 16 positions that are being created for the first time. They will be additional police numbers who will be experienced police officers working with our SCAN teams throughout the state.

I think that the creation of a superintendent to run the child protection area is a very important initiative of the Police Service and this government generally. I know that there has been some stress on the juvenile aid officers for some time and as I visited police stations around Queensland, those officers have talked to me about the increasing amount of time that they have been spending on child protection cases in particular. So I think that the 50 new officers will enable them to fulfil their obligations to child protection matters but also to spend the requisite amount of time dealing with juvenile offenders as such.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Page 1-8 of the MPS refers to the new output of community safety and refers specifically to the preservation of public safety and good order. Can you please inform the committee of the decrease in the number of offences that have occurred in the Queen Street Mall and what is being done to ensure public safety in the mall?

Ms SPENCE: Yes, we have heard quite a bit about safety in the Brisbane city mall in the last few weeks. We are told by council figures that in excess of one million persons walk through the mall each week. The figures provided by the Queensland Police Service indicate that there has been a general reduction in the number of crimes in Queen Street. The city station strategy that has been put in place in the Queen Street Mall requires at least two officers to be present in the mall on a 24-hour basis. On most shifts, four to five police officers are rostered for beat duty in the Adelaide Street Police Beat. In fact, I took a walk through the mall myself on Thursday and Friday nights last week and met the police who were working in the mall and I would have to say that on each occasion I felt very safe and protected.

The Brisbane City Council certainly assists in providing cameras in the mall and the police work very closely with the city council in that camera surveillance. In the last few weeks we have heard the Lord Mayor talk a lot about a memorandum of understanding with the Queensland Police Service. We are pleased to work with the council on issues such as the location of cameras and how we collectively respond to safety issues in the mall. However, we will not be signing a memorandum of understanding that prescribes police numbers in the mall. I believe that the police have to have the capacity to deploy their officers as they see fit and it is a judgment for them. They need to be able to use their officers flexibly. So while we will be signing a memorandum of understanding, it will not be about prescribing police numbers in the mall. I might ask the commissioner to make some further comment on that matter.

Comr Atkinson: Obviously, we hope to maintain a positive and sound working relationship with the Brisbane City Council. That has existed in the past and we are very hopeful that that will continue in the future. But one of my greatest concerns with this is that it is our view—and we are not trying to avoid the issue; it is an important issue—that the mall is a very, very safe place. As the minister has indicated, on our advice there are over one million pedestrian movements in the mall each week. The rate of reported assaults in the mall averages one a week, or slightly less than one a week—and that is all forms of assault and that includes assaults on police officers who are arresting offenders. We think that that is one indicator of a very, very sound situation in terms of public safety. So from my point of view, whilst perception is terribly important, we think that the issues of safety in the mall relate currently more to perception than any real substance of actual unsafe situations.

Mr ENGLISH: With reference to page 1-32 of the MPS, can the minister detail how the Queensland Police Service justice entry program provides opportunity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become Queensland Police Service officers?

Ms SPENCE: Thank you. I think that the justice entry program is something of which the Police Service should be justifiably proud. Indigenous Queenslanders represent three per cent of our population. At present, they represent 1.8 per cent of our serving police officers. I think that our Police Service should be reflective of the general population and we need to recruit even more indigenous police officers in this state.

The service has seen that need and in 2003 established the justice entry program. It was a trial and, because of its success, it will continue. Basically, it is a six-month program and indigenous people who have completed year 12 or have completed year 10 and have an extensive employment history can do this six-month course, which leads to a certificate IV in justice and then gives them the opportunity to enter the Police Service.

Last year, the program was highly successful and 10 of the 11 trainees who undertook the course went on to commence training as police recruits. I understand that the other trainee entered the Department of Corrective Services. Last year, the trainees were drawn from across the state including

Brisbane, Townsville, Mount Isa, Badu Island and Thursday Island. A new course started in March this year. Twelve indigenous trainees began the course and I wish them every success. The current trainees come from Cherbourg, Brisbane, Warwick, Cairns, Townsville, Ayr, Woorabinda and the Torres Strait.

So I use this opportunity to congratulate the Queensland Police Service on this justice entry program. They are getting good results. The indigenous officers who have been through the course and who have recently been sworn in as officers say that they have enjoyed their time at the Police Academy. Virtually, they spent 12 months there after they did the six-month course and then the six months recruit training and it has been very helpful with providing a very strong basis for joining the service. So they should end up being very positive role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.

The CHAIR: On page 1-4 of the MPS a commitment is made to establish eight new police beats over the next financial year. Could you provide further details of these new policing services and any other police beats that may be completed this financial year?

Ms SPENCE: Yes. There are currently 34 police beats in operation throughout the state. The eight new police beats announced in this budget are the first instalment in 25 new police beats that we expect to establish over the next three years through this government's Smart State Building Fund. The police beats have been a success story for the service and they are at the heart of our election commitments.

The locations of the eight new police beats to be set up this year are Point Lookout on North Stradbroke Island, Burpengary, Vincent-Heatley in the northern police region, The Strand in Townsville, Highfields, Seaford in the central police region, Yorkey's Knob, and Mooroolbool, which is in the far-northern police region. There is certainly quite a bit of work involved in establishing these new beats as the police have to canvass property that is a suitable location for themselves and for the local community and they have to find this property in what we know is a very competitive real estate market. However, I am very pleased with the work that they have already done in looking for property to establish these eight new police beats this year and over the next 12 months we are very confident that those beats will be established.

In addition to those eight new police beats, there will be a new beat becoming operational this year at Elanora on the Gold Coast after a successful purchase of premises in April this year. Also in addition, the current Logan central police shopfront will be replaced by a new four-officer Kingston-Woodridge Neighbourhood Police Beat, which I am sure that the member for Woodridge will be very pleased about, during this current year. So in total, it means that 10 new police beats will become operational during the 2004-05 year, increasing the community's access to police in those areas and strengthening the local partnerships with the community.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: I refer to page 1-3 of the MPS. Can you outline how the 15 live scan fingerprint systems for use in major police establishments across Queensland will assist policing?

Ms SPENCE: Yes, the 15 live-scan units will be placed in watch-houses and police stations. The government has provided \$3.552 million in funding over three years to provide these units. A further \$1.395 million has been identified from the existing Police budget. So the total planned expenditure over the three years is \$4.947 million.

The units will be used in major watch-houses across the state. The watch-houses for the first instalment include Brisbane, Southport, Toowoomba, Inala, Maroochydore, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns. These units will allow police to immediately process and search for prints, saving time and eliminating the risk of a charged person being bailed when they are wanted on warrants or wanted by Interpol. The computer and laser technology will allow police to scan fingers and palms from a glass plate to produce clear, undistorted prints. From the police I have talked to, they are excited about them: no more ink and no more mistakes—not that they would have made many mistakes, I am sure, Commissioner.

Comr Atkinson: Very few.

Ms SPENCE: In the Northern Territory, where it has been introduced, it has resulted in an 80 per cent reduction in unusable fingerprints, for example. So it is very accurate and it is a very important tool in clearing up crime. In the USA, the FBI estimated that over 11,000 wanted persons were released annually before the introduction of live scan. So that is not going to happen in the future in Queensland once this technology is introduced. Would you like to add anything to that?

Comr Atkinson: Indeed. This is a significant advancement for us. It is state-of-the-art equipment. It enables a timely identification of wanted persons—many of whom, of course, are expert in concealing their identities or having false identities. Fingerprint and DNA evidence cannot be argued. Additionally, the number of these units that are being sent throughout the state have been allocated on the basis of volume. So they are going to our busiest areas.

There will also be a significant saving in time, as the minister indicated, in terms of the traditional method of taking fingerprints—the ink-rolling method and then their having to be sent away for

identification purposes. Previously, what had to happen was that that person had to be kept in custody until that identification was complete. Obviously, this process will make that identification almost instantaneous. So it is something that we just are very pleased about. I think with absolute confidence and certainty we can say that even before this is introduced it will be very successful and provide excellent results for us

Mr FRASER: At page 1-9 of the MPS reference is made to the commencement of the Railway Squad outpost at Redbank Railway Station. Can you advise the committee on how the Railway Squad is improving the safety of passengers on train services in Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: The Railway Squad is a squad, I guess, that we do not hear much about. They are not a high-profile squad but they are providing a very important, high-profile uniform presence on the Citytrain rail network. They operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They cover the line from Gympie to Cleveland, from Robina to Rosewood on that Citytrain network. They are overseen by an inspector. At the present time he has a current strength of 50 police officers, two police liaison officers, and an administrative support.

Since the Beattie government has come to office we have increased the strength of the Railway Squad by 22 officers, so that has nearly doubled the number of police officers who are now patrolling the network. I recently had the privilege of visiting the Railway Squad at their headquarters in Roma Street. They work very closely with Queensland Rail. The officers there are doing a terrific job in picking up offences that might happen on trains or in the railway precinct. In fact, from July last year until May this year nearly 21,000 offences were detected by the Railway Squad. That compares to just over 11,000 in the previous 12 months. So they have nearly doubled the number of offences they have picked up.

The Railway Squad in that time laid more than 1,500 criminal charges for offences such as assault, wilful damage and car and property theft. This compares to 914 in the previous year. It also laid more than 2,600 simple offence charges for matters such as fare evasion and inappropriate behaviours such as public nuisance. The squad has also issued more than 16,000 tickets—almost double the number for the previous 11 months. The squad finalised more than 300 warrants and compiled more than 17,000 activity report cards in the last 12 months. I know that members of the squad will soon be welcomed by commuters on the Ipswich line, as the Redbank Plains post opens in the future.

With a budget of more than \$2.5 million, the Railway Squad will continue to improve the safety of more than 1.5 million commuters who use the network each year. I am not a railway user myself—I use bus from my place—but I am sure that those people who use the trains in Queensland are very conscious of the police presence and the safety they secure for railway passengers.

The CHAIR: That completes the government block of questions.

Mr HORAN: Minister, earlier this morning the Leader of the Opposition asked the Attorney-General a question about diversion of people who had been charged with soliciting on the streets—it was three prostitutes—to drug rehabilitation programs. He indicated that there were three systems of diversion—police diversion, court diversion and drug court diversion—and he undertook to get the data on court and drug court diversion. Would you be able to provide us with the number of people charged with soliciting on the streets and how many of those were given a police drug diversion direction?

Ms SPENCE: I can tell you that in the last year there were 765 charges laid in relation to street prostitution. Six hundred and sixty-six of those charges were laid against men, so the number of charges against prostitutes themselves was small in comparison. I know that the Attorney-General advised the committee this morning that there was no database that records whether street workers were referred to drug or rehab programs as part of their sentencing. I know that that was canvassed. What I can talk about today is the work of the Prostitution Licensing Authority in assisting prostitutes out of the industry. That is certainly an aim of this government.

What we do at the moment is refer women who are working in the industry to an organisation called Southern Edge Training, which is funded by this government to help prostitutes leave the industry. It is located in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Townsville. It provides career transition and employment training programs. It provides one-on-one career counselling and assistance. It case-manages people who have left or want to leave the sex industry as well as people who are in danger of entering the sex industry. People are referred to this organisation by the police, by the PLA, by SQWISI, their representative organisation, or even by the Queensland Intravenous AIDS Association. They are referred there by adult shops and by Drug-Arm. The program provides support and referral to other agencies for specific problems that are not necessarily related to employment, such as drug use.

That has been going since January 2003. So from January 2003 to March this year it has signed up 48 women. There have been six dropouts, 15 of the women have gained alternative employment and four are currently undergoing tertiary education. Since it has been going since only January last year, the organisation believes it is improving its performance on last year and improving the network of referrals to the organisation. So, yes, we are committed to helping these women leave the industry and get necessary referrals to drug rehab or other agencies.

Mr HORAN: Thank you, Minister. I refer to page 1-38 of the MPS, which details the capital works program for the QPS for 2004-05. Despite this being a record budget for capital works overall, some \$2.7 million less is budgeted to be spent this year on building new police stations and upgrading existing stations and facilities, which I believe will make this the lowest capital works budget for the police since the Beattie government came to office in 1998. Minister, can you advise why, at a time when the population is increasing and the number of officers is increasing, we see this reduction in the capital works budget for police?

Ms SPENCE: I will just say some general things about the capital works budget and then I might pass over to Mr John Just. The issue is that there is not going to be a reduction in the capital works that are allocated to built assets. As I travel around the state and talk with police, I am well aware of the capital works needs of police officers. In recent years we have employed so many more police officers and we tend to overcrowd some of our existing stations. I acknowledge that. That is why we need to put so much more money into upgrading police stations around the state. I think we have done a good job in the last six or eight years in improving and building new police stations, but the need certainly is great. There is also a need to upgrade police housing in western Queensland. I visited a lot of that housing, and I am committed to finding more money to upgrade those houses in the future for officers.

But there is not a reduction in the money we will be putting into built assets. What you do not see in this particular figure you are quoting is the money that would normally be here for IT necessarily. Nor do you see the \$8.6 million that will be carried over in the built assets budget for this year. Importantly, there will not be a reduction in the built assets budget. For the IT information I will pass over to John Just.

Mr Just: Thank you, Minister. We went to CBRC at the start of 2004-05 to do our capital budget. Because we were in the middle of doing the new IT program for the whole service—it is a new integrated system—CBRC requested more information on our IT project. We were not ready to provide that at the start of 2004-05 when we went to CBRC. It is expected that when we finally decide on the whole integrated system of IT for the Police Service we will be able to go back to CBRC. They expect us to go back in September and they expect that we will get in the order of \$10 million additional in our capital works program for 2004-05.

That is redirecting the funding for 2004-05 from built assets to IT because of the need to get new integrated systems in the Police Service. The Police Service currently has quite a number of systems that are not integrated, which means that more work by police officers is done manually rather than through IT systems. This additional system will help the police in terms of productivity, and it is expected that more police will be available to work on the roads because of this new system.

To give you an indication, the budget for 2004-05 is currently about \$101 million, but it is expected that by the time we finish the year we will have a spend of in excess of \$130 million to \$135 million, once we have made the adjustments through finance committee and through CBRC.

Mr HORAN: Thank you. Minister, with regard to speed camera enforcement, page 1-26 of the MPS provides for an extension of the road safety initiative funding package. That funding is for both extra speed camera officer hours and additional on-road non-camera police enforcement. A couple of these important items will no longer be in the output statement because you are taking out 37 of those 108 performance indicators, including the number of hours' deployment of speed cameras and the number of hours officers undertake speed enforcement other than speed cameras. Those figures will no longer be available for us to examine in the future meetings. Can you tell us, then, how much of this road safety initiative funding is going to be for speed camera enforcement? How many additional speed cameras will then be operational throughout the state? How many additional sites and how many additional officers will be deployed?

Ms SPENCE: I am just trying to get the accurate figures for you. The road safety funding package has been allocated a budget of \$3.1 million from 1 July this year to 3 January next year. This funding initiative is being evaluated by the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety, CARRS. The evaluation revealed that road safety crashes were reduced by 8.8 per cent from projections normally expected during the period of the trial. As part of the Queensland government's commitment to road safety during the 2003-04 financial year, \$10.7 million was allocated to the Police Service as part of the road safety initiatives package. This funding was distributed throughout the police regions in order to increase speed camera use from five-hour days to eight-hour days. In addition, under the government's road safety initiatives funding package an additional 31,104 officer hours towards non-camera on-road traffic enforcement were provided to target peak holiday periods.

An extension of the road safety initiatives funding package has been provided by the government for the period 1 July this year to 3 October this year. The Queensland Police Service will receive a further \$3.1 million for that period. The extension of this package will maintain speed camera operations at eight hours a day and will see an additional 12,800 officer hours dedicated to non-camera enforcement activity over the peak holiday periods.

This funding is currently being evaluated by the Monash University Accident Research Centre. It is envisaged that this evaluation will be released in July. Based on the findings of the Monash University

project, the government will then consider whether we want to extend that funding beyond the October period.

Mr HORAN: Does that mean, then, there will be extra sites? I asked whether there will be extra sites and how many. Will extra officers be seconded to undertake those extra sites? Will there be additional cameras? Also, would you be able to provide the committee with a record of the meetings of the stakeholder committees that meet to consider speed camera locations?

The CHAIR: Is that last question to be put on notice?

Mr HORAN: I am happy for that question to be taken on notice, because it is complex.

Ms SPENCE: The commissioner is happy to talk about speed cameras and the location of speed camera sites.

Mr HORAN: The extra sites and extra cameras, if there are extra?

Ms SPENCE: Yes.

Mr HORAN: Is it okay to take on notice the question about the stakeholder committees that consider speed camera locations?

Ms SPENCE: We will see if we have it here. Otherwise we will take it on notice.

Comr Atkinson: Mr Horan, I will endeavour to answer the question to the best of my ability, but we may have to follow up with further information at some future time. We currently have 24 speed cameras. It is not my understanding that we are going to increase the number of cameras, but the capacity could be there to use those cameras for longer periods than they are currently used.

Again, in terms of the question of police officers, consistent with the number of cameras, it may not be necessary to increase the number of police officers. It may be that with different rostering with the use of overtime the same number of officers who are currently engaged in the use of the speed cameras could be consistent, but if there was a need I am sure we could quite comfortably find extra officers to maintain a speed camera program or an enhanced speed camera program.

As you are aware, Sir, the site selection is based on crash history over a period of years, and the issue of sites I do not believe would change in terms of the selection criteria. So, again, I have to give you a qualified response in saying that at this stage I am not aware of any proposal for increased sites, but I would assume if it were to occur it would be based on the same criteria and could well occur if crash site history changed.

The other factor could be new roads. The M1 is perhaps a good example of that. I understand that the site history—the road crash history—goes back several years, so it could well be that there are additional sites but my understanding would be that they would be based on the traditional criteria of road accident crash history in the vicinity of that location. If those responses are not satisfactory, could I through the minister ask you to advise us in due course if you seek further information and we will endeavour to provide it.

Ms SPENCE: We will certainly take on notice the meetings of that committee. We have not got it here.

Mr HORAN: I appreciate that.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Minister, may I first place on the public record my thanks to you for establishing a tactical crime squad in Maryborough. That was something we were really looking forward to and now that it is operational it is a great thing. When I have looked at question on notice No. 1, it seems that 15 of the 16 tactical crime squads have a membership of 14. This might be the easiest question you answer all day. Is there any reason why all those crime squads are 14-member squads and not 13- or 16-member squads? The Cairns one, I note, is 21. Is there a reason for that or are there plans to expand the size of those particular tactical crime squads?

Ms SPENCE: I do know that the Cairns one is larger than the others because it is purposely developed that way to service the Cape—obviously a big geographical area. As to why there are 14 and not 13, I think maybe the commissioner might have a better operational understanding of that.

Comr Atkinson: The original plan was to have two tactical crime squads on each of the eight regions, which would have been 16. The Cairns squad was increased to 21 to cover the Cape, as the minister indicated. Particularly in terms of the current alcohol management plans, it has been most helpful. So, in effect, there is a mini-tactical crime squad of seven over and beyond the number of 14.

The other consideration that was worked into that was it was felt that the northern region has two substantial towns—Townsville and Mount Isa and it was felt that Mount Isa did not justify a full squad of 14, so that was reduced to seven. So at the end of the day Mount Isa's tactical crime squad ended up as seven and Cairns has ended up as 21, their being only one in the far-northern region. That gave us the luxury of being able to locate a third squad in a region, and there was a lot of thought that went into that but ultimately it was decided that the third squad would go to Maryborough. So on the north coast region, which is your region, Sir, there are tactical crime squads on the Sunshine Coast, at Redcliffe and

at Maryborough. But there is an understanding, and I think everyone would accept this, that the Maryborough squad assists out at Bundaberg and occasionally at Gympie. So it is more a Wide Bay-Burnett squad than specifically a Maryborough based squad.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: We just like to call it Maryborough. So it is really more a matter of how you have distributed the numbers via the number of squads rather than 14 being the absolute optimum number for a squad?

Comr Atkinson: Precisely. The original model was 16 14-officer squads—two in each region. That is a total of 208 officers. At the end of the day, we think we have ended up with a better model working on a situational basis.

Mr HORAN: In the capital acquisition statement there is no funding for a police helicopter. At a recent house fire at Pullenvale the police were assisted by helicopters in the search for the owner of the house. Also I think with the recent long traffic hold-up on Ipswich road accessibility was a problem. Has any consideration been given to the use of a helicopter for the police when you consider they are looking after some two million people in the immediate vicinity of south-east Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: At the moment the police are not saying that the acquisition of a helicopter is one of their highest priorities. I am sure if they were given one they would be very welcoming of it, but at the moment their top priority was to replace the King Air, and we have done that. We have provided \$2.9 million for a new plane. I am happy to go into the reasons why that is important, but I know that the commissioner has talked to me and his other priorities would be a new plane for western Queensland before he considered a helicopter for the Brisbane area.

The police have accessibility to State Emergency Services' helicopters. Where you hear that in other states the police have helicopters it is really a matter of badging. In Queensland we have given our helicopters to the State Emergency Service and police can use them, but in other states the helicopters are part of the Police Service squad and they are used by Emergency Services. It is not as if Queensland has fewer helicopters necessarily than other states. The reality, I am told, is that a helicopter in Brisbane would likely be only available to be in the air for a maximum of two hours each day, and the likelihood of that being in the air when it was actually needed is very, very small. So in terms of crime fighting or even a safety perspective or policing needs it is not a huge priority, but I will let the commissioner talk more about the helicopter.

Comr Atkinson: Indeed I do not think anyone at a senior level has ever been critical of the concept of a helicopter or suggested that it is a ridiculous concept, but in terms of priority for me it has a much lower priority than fixed wing aircraft. I am extremely appreciative of the aircraft we have received in terms of the upgraded plane.

The next priority for me, as the minister indicated, would be an aircraft based in south-western Queensland to do a run from Charleville through to Roma and Toowoomba, and that would be extremely helpful. Again, after that the next priority for me would be a fixed wing aircraft based on Horn Island to service the Torres Strait, and a helicopter would come possibly after that. I could add a fair bit to this debate but in terms of priority it rates down the scale, but I am not dismissing it at all.

Mr HORAN: Minister, on page 1-3 of the MPS it refers to the establishment of a seniors task force.

The CHAIR: I might have to move on from there, sorry. You got in just before I was about to say something.

Mr ENGLISH: I refer to page 1-15 of the MPS. Can you outline the Queensland Police Service's forensic facility upgrades throughout the state? Can you advise as to how these facilities satisfy the international standard required to achieve accreditation by the National Association of Testing Authorities?

Ms SPENCE: The government has allocated \$3.6 million in this year's budget to ensure all of the police laboratories and testing facilities are accredited. The national accreditation of all the QPS testing and calibration laboratories will mean that evidence presented in court will be irrefutable.

We are committed to regional and rural Queensland and we have seen facilities accredited at Longreach, Charleville, Ayr, Kingaroy, Dalby, Redcliffe and Kawana Waters, and laboratories are currently under construction at Maryborough and Nerang. Other major facilities upgrades have been completed at police headquarters and are being planned as we speak for Upper Mount Gravatt in the next few months. Minor facility upgrades have been completed at Mareeba, Cairns, Innisfail, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Emerald, Bundaberg, Gympie, Warwick, Roma, Hendra, Indooroopilly, Cleveland, Inala and Logan.

The government's investment in the future of the police forensic services accreditation includes \$110,000 for research into emergency emerging forensic technologies and methods to ensure that Queensland remains at the cutting edge of scientific advances when it comes to identifying and convicting criminals. This year's funding also includes \$963,000 for 95 evidentiary breath analysing

instruments which will ensure that Queensland police have some of the latest and most advanced equipment in the world.

The NATA accreditation process will guarantee the ongoing integrity of the Queensland Police Service's forensic service and will mean that the service can maintain best practice through staff training, review of procedures, internal auditing and maintenance of cutting edge scientific facilities and equipment. So the government is determined to give the police the best possible tools to solve crime and the NATA accreditation process is certainly an important part of that process.

The CHAIR: I refer to page 1-16 of the MPS. Can you inform the committee how the five now operational specialist drug detection handler dog teams will enhance the Queensland Police Service?

Ms SPENCE: There are 63 dog squad teams, 28 of which are based in Brisbane. The role of the dog squad is to provide tracking and apprehending offenders from scenes of crime, searching for missing persons and escapees, searching for lost and discarded property, detaining persons threatening violence, providing support and protection for police and preserving order with crowd control capabilities.

The police obviously and the government acknowledge that they are a valuable weapon in the arsenal in the war against drugs. In the period 1 July 2003 to 6 June this year, the Brisbane drug squad personnel attended 4,560 jobs. Persons or property were located on 752 occasions and the dog squad also assisted in 355 drug raids. The drug dogs are trained in the detection of powder narcotics including heroin, cocaine, amphetamine, ecstasy and ice, and two drug detection dog teams were established in 2002. Their success in detecting drugs has led to the seizure of many drugs and drug utensils right across the state. The teams have undergone drug detection courses held by customs officers in Canberra and the teams now provide a drug search capability on a statewide basis.

Earlier this year I was very pleased to guarantee the future of police dogs in this state when we allocated and announced funding for a puppy development program. The police tell me it is becoming increasingly difficult to locate dogs that are suitable for their purposes not just for drug detection but also for general duties. So the development of these new puppy kennels at the academy will ensure that we have sufficient dogs for the future. I understand from looking at the media recently that the blind dog association and even the Corrective Services Department are all struggling to find suitable dogs for their needs. So this is going to be a very important tool for the police and ensure that there are dogs.

Mr FRASER: Minister, can you outline for the committee how the state drug investigation group will be enhancing its ability to target the amphetamine market and clandestine laboratories in Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: Yes, I can. We have allocated \$4.7 million in this year's budget to the drug investigation group, which investigates major and organised drug related offences. Through proactive operations this group's team from 1 July last year to the end of May this year shut down 166 illicit drug laboratories. Eleven covert operations resulted in the arrest of 216 people and the laying of 616 drug and other criminal charges. The eight overt operations undertaken by the state drug investigation squad has resulted in the arrest of 718 people and the laying of 1,834 drug and other criminal charges.

The team conducted Operation Carmine. It was a high visibility policing operation specifically targeting drugs on the Gold Coast, and over an eight-month period from July last year to February this year over \$2.3 million worth of drugs were seized and \$972,000 worth of property was also seized.

One hundred and eighty-six people were arrested and were charged with 587 offences. The total value of property seized by the State Drug Investigation Group of nearly \$5.87 million demonstrates that drugs and the proceeds of crime and the sale of drugs will be confiscated by the police. I take this opportunity to congratulate that team on some work well done in the last 12 months.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, can you inform the committee how the Queensland Police Service has continued to support the research project on rural and remote traffic accidents being conducted by the Centre for Accident and Road Research Safety—Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: This is a very interesting project. The Police Service supports the project, along with a lot of other agencies, including the Motor Accident Insurance Commission, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Transport, Main Roads, Emergency Services, Queensland Rail and Q-Fleet. We contribute \$10,000 per annum. We are contributing over the next five years, along with those other agencies. Preliminary data collection is well under way.

The project will be a comparison study of 250 people in road crashes within 100 kilometres of a participating project hospital. The hospitals participating include Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, Charters Towers, Mareeba and Atherton. Data will be compared with road crash victims admitted through emergency departments of the Royal Brisbane and the PA Hospital in Brisbane. Characteristics of the crash sites and the drivers will be identified through site and hospital visits and all crash sites will be revisited by the research team to recruit a comparison group of drivers for interview. A further investigation and in depth interview of 400 crash patients will be undertaken.

Basically what they are looking at is the differences in the reasons for traffic accidents in rural and regional Queensland as compared to the metropolitan area. The government expects that there will be many benefits from this research. There will be lots of information about road design, particularly in regional and rural Queensland. There will be information for the police about resourcing allocations for the future. There will be real savings, of course, if we can bring the road toll down, particularly in regional and rural areas of the state.

The CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 1-3 of the MPS. Can you inform the committee of the QPS's ongoing support of the counter-terrorism unit?

Ms SPENCE: As I said, we have initially allocated \$2.4 million to the counter-terrorism unit. I have talked about the kind of officers who will staff this unit. One of the things that will be very important for terrorism and our response to it in this state, if it may eventuate, is the upgrade of the plane that we were talking about before. The 12-seat Beechcraft King Air is going to be replaced by a new 19-seat plane. This means that two SERT teams will be able to get on the plane and go anywhere in Queensland, and that has not been possible in the past. That new aircraft is not just going to be used as an important tool for making the milk run from Cairns to Brisbane three times a week and allowing us to take more prisoners or police around the state, it is also going to be a very important tool for the SERT teams for the future. I might ask the commissioner to say a few words about that unit.

Comr Atkinson: Thank you, Minister. I am pleased that the unit has received recurrent funding and will be a permanent fixture. But probably a good point to make is that it is not the only area of the service which has a strong involvement in counter-terrorism activity. As its name implies, it is the Counterterrorism coordination Unit, and its role and function is to coordinate activity within the department with the Premier's office in terms of state government activity, and at a local government and national level. Its purpose is coordination. The early indications are that it is performing that role quite satisfactorily.

Other key areas for us are our disaster and major event planning branch, our Security Intelligence Branch, and our Special Emergency Response Team. As well at a national level the deputy is represented on the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, which is formally called SACPAV. They meet twice a year. Our focus is a three-part focus consistent with government policy. First is prevention, which we think is the priority. Preventing an incident happening—and we will do our very best to do that—is our number one priority. Secondly, if, unfortunately, a terrorist incident were to occur in Queensland, our capacity to respond quickly to this incident and investigate it and resolve it in terms of circumstances and find out who was responsible and, thirdly, in terms of the consequence management. Of course, there are horrific consequences of these things. The Bali tragedy is an indication of that in terms of victim identification alone, which is a huge impost. We are also very conscious of the broader issue of chemical, biological and radiological issues with terrorism, but the trend would seem to be, regrettably, that the greatest threat is still bombs in vehicles.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, I refer to page 1-25 of the MPS. Can you outline the positive impact the Beattie government's antihooning laws have had?

Ms SPENCE: Yes. Since the antihooning laws came into effect in November 2002, 1,325 cars have been confiscated by police as of 31 May this year. I have to say that these hooning laws have not made the Beattie government very popular amongst young male drivers. I have one at home, a 19-year-old, and I know from him and his friends that they do not like them. They do not like me being the police minister responsible for them either, but I have to say they are very, very supportive of these laws and of the police actions in picking up these drivers who would pose a threat to public safety, not only to themselves but to the general community.

Just to see how successful the antihooning laws have been in a deterrent sense, there have only been 15 people who have been charged with a second offence since the legislation was introduced and only three people have been charged with a third offence. I think, given that 1,325 people have been convicted of first offences, these young people are certainly learning a lesson about the consequences of hooning around our suburbs.

Since the inception of the legislation, the State Traffic Task Force has confiscated 237 vehicles, or 18 per cent of the state's total. I think it is very important legislation in reducing our road toll and protecting these young people and the general community. Did you want to say anything about that?

Comr Atkinson: Thank you, Minister. I think it seems to be working well. One of the interesting things from our perspective, in terms of senior management, is that whilst no-one would suggest that serious violent crime is not terribly important, when you get out and talk to people in the community it is things like graffiti and hooning which is terribly important to them. In terms of us being in touch with the grass roots issues for people in the community, I think that is important as well. As a police department, clearly serious violent crime—homicides, armed hold-ups and rape offences—would take priority, but fortunately in many communities those offences are not prevalent. What is really important for people are issues that relate to their peace and good behaviour, and their feeling about how safe they are. Thank you.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, I refer to page 1-3 of the MPS. Can you inform the committee of the QPS's continuing support of the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices program?

Ms SPENCE: I can, as I was the minister responsible for introducing the alcohol restriction legislation and the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices program generally. We all said at the time that this was only going to be a success if the indigenous communities supported alcohol restrictions and if the police were very proactive in policing sly grogging in those communities. I am pleased to report that the police are very enthusiastic and successful at supporting these laws.

The commissioner and I made a visit to the cape quite recently and talked to police in a number of communities. They tell us that violence has reduced in those communities. Alcohol consumption has certainly reduced. The police have worked well with Liquor Licensing and the community justice groups in enforcing the dry and safe places and the tougher alcohol restrictions. As the commissioner mentioned before, the tactical crime squad, which is based in Cairns, has been deployed to a number of these communities to assist the local police in policing these initiatives.

When we hear from the Police Union and from others from time to time that there are not enough police in the cape communities to police these new laws, we really do have to take into consideration this 21-person tactical crime squad in Cairns that was put there for this very purpose—to assist the police in those remote communities with the policing of those new laws. I know that when there has been the odd occasion on Mornington Island or other communities where a serious incident has arisen, then the tactical crime squad has been there very quickly to assist the local police. I might ask the commissioner to talk a bit more about the policing of that.

Comr Atkinson: Thanks, Minister. I think this is probably one of the most challenging areas. The difficulty and depth of this issue is quite significant, but I can confirm absolutely that the police are supportive of the alcohol management plans. Only on the weekend we had an incident at the Three Rivers Tavern outside Aurukun. A person who was badly affected by alcohol had gone there from Aurukun and, with a piece of timber, caused some violence and assaulted several people. The police went and detained this person, who was taken into custody. It was obviously a very violent incident. I rang the officers and thanked them—a male officer and a female officer—for their work. One of the officers I spoke to had been at Aurukun for six months. I said to him, 'Well, look, you know, do you drink?' He said, 'Yes, I do.' I said, 'How have you found it?' He said, 'Well, I've actually signed up voluntarily to do another six months because I just think it is so worthwhile and to see the reduction in the violence.' I said, 'Well, what do you do when you want to have a drink?' He said, 'Well, a couple of us just get in the car and on our days off we go into Weipa.'

I think that demonstrates their level of commitment. I think that the people who work in the communities, not just the police but the ones who tend to be there permanently—and that is the teachers and the health department employees across the board—do a good job and deserve everyone's praise and support. But I do not think as well that the degree of difficulty associated with this issue can be underestimated. I think it is disappointing at times that some people think that there are single or simple solutions to what is a complex problem.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I call the member for Toowoomba South.

Mr HORAN: Minister, page 1-16 of the MPS refers to the work of Task Force Argos in the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit. It is a highly regarded unit throughout the state. Minister, the CMC investigation into the Volkens matter looked at the issue of the exclusion of police in the decision making process in that matter. Has there been any progress made since then regarding the inclusion of police in these important decision making processes where there had been criticism by the opposition, complainants and the police for that agreement, which excluded the police from involvement in the decision to drop the case?

Ms SPENCE: I will ask the commissioner to comment on that one.

Comr Atkinson: Thank you. My understanding—and again I may have to take follow-up questions on notice from you, sir, on this—is that the government has substantially accepted the CMC recommendations—possibly not all of them but certainly I think the vast majority of them. Whilst I do not think I have replied to the letter issued earlier this week—I received a letter via the Attorney-General—in terms of establishing an overview committee so that the police department could be represented in terms of the implementation of the CMC's recommendations in terms of the work of the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. I would envisage that, given the importance of that issue, I would fulfil that role as the police department's representative on that committee that is to be set up to implement those recommendations.

I think the situation probably, if I could say so in respect of that particular issue, is perhaps an aberration as well. Broadly, the department does work well with the DPP and we take the advice of the DPP. Quite often police briefs as evidence come back to us from the DPP before the prosecution is commenced in the District Court or the Supreme Court with a request for further investigative action to take place to strengthen the quality of the brief. We take that on board. We do not argue the point on that and accept the advice. As well, we work well with the DPP in the context at times—not often but at

times—of forwarding a brief of evidence to the DPP to ask their advice as to whether or not, in their view, it justifies a prosecution being initiated. Broadly, there is a good relationship. There is always scope for improvement and I think that the CMC recommendations, once implemented, will create an improved situation.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The time for non-government questions has expired. That brings the committee's consideration of estimates for the Department of Police to a close. Thank you, Minister, and your advisers for coming along today and assisting us. The committee will break until 3.45 and then commence examining estimates for the Department of Corrective Services.

Ms SPENCE: Could I put on the public record my thanks to the Queensland Police Service who worked so hard in preparation for this estimates hearing today, not only the members who join me at the table but particularly Senior Sergeant Tony Flemming and Senior Sergeant Simon James who have put in a sterling effort. Thank you.

Mr HORAN: On behalf of non-government members thank you for your assistance, and to the Commissioner and his staff, thank you.

Sitting suspended from 3.30 p.m. to 3.48 p.m.

The CHAIR: The committee will now examine estimates for Corrective Services. In accordance with the sessional orders at least half the time for questions at today's hearing will be allotted to non-government members. The time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner.

For the benefit of *Hansard* I ask advisers to please identify themselves before they answer a question. The first round of questions will come from non-government members and I call the member for Toowoomba South.

Mr HORAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister knows, but for the benefit of the staff I am deputising for Vaughan Johnson who had to attend a funeral in Longreach of a close friend. My first question is regarding your announcement on 7 April of an audit of prison procedures at the state's custodial correction centres. There does not appear to be anything in the MPS referring to this audit, nor does there appear to be any reference to it in the question on notice that was asked. Is this audit under way? Is it funded in this budget and if it is funded in this budget what correctional centres is it going to be covering?

Ms SPENCE: You are quite right, there is no mention of the audit in the MPS. This MPS was well under way and written before that was announced. The audit certainly is well under way. We expect the results of that audit in the next couple of months. I will ask the Director-General. I would firstly like to introduce the people at the table with me, I have got Frank Rockett on my right, the Director-General; next to Frank is Fiona Rafter and on my left is Arthur Evans, our principal financial officer for the department. I will ask the Director-General to comment on the process of the audit and the expected completion date.

Mr Rockett: Thank you, Minister. The auditors will be funded from within the existing budget. The purpose of the audit is that approximately three years ago general managers' rules were abolished and they were replaced by a set of policies and procedures for the running of custodial centres across the state. The purpose of the audit is to determine how well and how consistently each of the custodial centres across the state is applying policy and procedure. The two people who were seconded to do that project were the Acting Executive Director Custodial Corrections and the internal auditor.

Those two officers over a period of approximately five months will visit every custodial centre twice. They have a range of instruments available to them to determine how well each centre is applying departmental policy and departmental procedure, and there are many of those, and certainly how well they are applying them consistently.

I guess the issue for the department is that while we recognise that Lotus Glen certainly would operate slightly differently to perhaps Sir David Longland they still need to operate in some sort of consistency within a risk management framework.

Coming out of that audit, which I expect to come to me in approximately one month's time, the department will then be developing a fairly robust performance measurement framework and a performance management framework for all general managers of all custodial centres so that we are applying policy and procedures consistently and in an appropriate risk management framework.

Mr HORAN: Minister, you and the Director-General might be able to clear this matter up for me. The audit I am referring to was the one that you announced, Minister, on 7 April this year following the tabling of a report into the management, staffing and operations of maximum security units and it followed the death in October 2003 of a maximum security unit prisoner at Sir David Longland Correctional Centre. Are we talking about the same audit?

Ms SPENCE: Yes.

Mr HORAN: I am talking about the audit which the minister said on 7 April that you were going to undertake.

Mr Rockett: To give an explanation, there were two audit processes. On the death of prisoner Day in October last year at Sir David Longland the inspector's report made a number of findings; one of them was to look at the policy and procedures that the two maximum security units operate under, and they are situated at both Sir David Longland and Arthur Gorrie. That audit was completed and provided to the department. There were 52 recommendations and we have almost completely implemented those. The second audit that the minister announced came out of that. Because there were issues that were exposed at Sir David Longland we wanted then to have some surety that we were applying policy and procedures right across the state.

Ms SPENCE: And that is what you just talked about.

Mr Rockett: Yes.

Ms SPENCE: I think that I mentioned that on that day, too. The audit that the Director-General just talked about into every correctional centre is the one that I announced on that day.

Mr HORAN: On that day you said that the audit into the other two with the 52 recommendations had been undertaken.

Ms SPENCE: That's right.

Mr HORAN: So what we are referring to now—

Ms SPENCE: Is the one the Director-General is talking about into every centre.

Mr HORAN: You are saying it is under way?

Ms SPENCE: Yes.

Mr HORAN: Is there any funding in this budget towards it? I presume there is. Do you have an amount set aside for it?

Mr Rockett: Yes, and it will come out of the internal budget. It is really the salaries of two senior officers for approximately a period of five months. I can quantify that for you. It would be approximately in the vicinity of \$150,000 but it will come out of existing resources.

Mr HORAN: I want to talk about overcrowding in correctional centres from the response that you provided to the non-government question on notice. As of 30 June four correctional centres are above their capacity. Two of these are the Arthur Gorrie centre and the Sir David Longland centre which are above their capacities for each year that was detailed in the answer from 2002 to 2004. How, out of this budget, are you going to address that overcrowding issue at those two prisons?

Ms SPENCE: As you would be aware, money was provided in this budget for commissioning of new beds at Woodford, and that is as a response to the overcrowding issues in those four prisons that you mentioned. We believe that the bringing on line of 64 additional cells at Woodford will address the overcrowding in the south-east corner of the state for the time being.

I have to say that this is not a new problem in terms of north Queensland and we are looking at long-term management of prisoners to stop the practice of overcrowding in the future.

Mr HORAN: With the Maryborough prison the figures that we have show that it is set up for 500 beds. It is funded for 200 beds. In the answer you gave to a question on notice you tended to indicate problems with putting people into correctional centres who did not live in that area or transferring them away from their families.

In this budget are you providing additional funds to increase the number of funded beds or cells within that prison or are you leaving it at 200 again?

Ms SPENCE: We are not. We have only funded the additional 64 cells at Woodford Correctional Centre in this budget. This will result in a funded operating capacity of 5,261 secure and open-custody beds across our system which should provide an occupancy rate of 96 per cent. So we are going to have funded 5,261 secure and open-custody beds. At the moment we have 5,060 secure and open-custody prisoners. So, with these 64 additional beds we believe that we should have the right capacity for the next 12 months.

I think we are in a very enviable position in this state that we have that built capacity in the Maryborough prison and we have even more built capacity to bring beds on line at the Woodford prison in the future. We are indeed in an enviable position and we will bring those beds on line as of need but we are not going to start funding beds that we really do not need in the system now. To stop the double up, it is more about management of prisoners and making sure that we are getting those prisoners in those beds at those right locations.

I hope in a perfect world we never have to commission the beds in the Maryborough prison or more beds in the Woodford prison and that we can maintain or even reduce our current prisoner

numbers, but as I said, we are in a good position of having excess capacity and we can bring them on line as we need them.

Mr HORAN: Do you feel that some of the problems that have come out of Sir David Longland and Arthur Gorrie have been due to the fact that the places have been absolutely chock-a-block and are you going to maintain them, by your own words, in the order of 96, 98 per cent?

Ms SPENCE: They are not chock-a-block.

Mr HORAN: They are over their limit; they have more people than they are designed for.

Ms SPENCE: There are some double-ups from time to time at those locations. If anyone cares to take the time to read the reports that I have already released on, for example, the death of the prisoner at Sir David Longland you would know that issue had nothing to do with overcrowding in that prison. It was about a number of issues. I have not seen any evidence yet to show that any death that has occurred in any prison in Queensland in the last few years has been a result of overcrowding. There are a number of issues of concern but that is not necessarily one that is exercising any poor management of the prison.

Mr HORAN: I refer to page 3-10 of the MPS, which is the output statement for the 'Facility-based Containment Services'. Out of the total number of prisoners, which is some 5,250 between all three levels of custody identified in the MPS, what is the number of foreign people—that is, people without Australian citizenship—here temporarily or illegally who are currently in Queensland's correctional centres and can you indicate how long each of these prisoners has been imprisoned in Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: I am sure we can. Between 1999 and 2003 an average of 178 detainees were accommodated each year for varying periods under an agreement with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. The Commonwealth pays us a rate of \$95 per day per prisoner. As you know, we are in a unique situation in Queensland because we do not have an immigration detention centre. It is up to the state to look after those detainees.

Numbers do vary, but there are generally less than 20 immigration detainees in custody in Queensland at any point in time. The vast majority of detainees are in custody for immigration reasons only. However, a small proportion are those who have served a sentence for an offence and are awaiting deportation. As of 1 July this year, the department was holding 27 detainees within our correctional centres.

Consultation on the finalisation of the revised agreement between the state and the Commonwealth has been ongoing for some time and it is in its final stages. Queensland has insisted that the revised agreement provide for increased monetary compensation to the state for costs associated with the provision of a dedicated immigration detention unit and the collateral cost of accommodating immigration detainees—that is, the cost of the health and dental services we provide for them. We are now awaiting further advice from the Commonwealth. I hope that answers that question.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: I want to go to your response to my question about the Maryborough Correctional Centre and the transferring of prisoners. You said that prisoners may be transferred for a range of reasons. I recently contacted your office about a gentleman who was transferred away from Maryborough even though his family is in Maryborough. Can you expand on the typical reasons a prisoner would be transferred away from a facility like the Maryborough Correctional Centre when the person's family is still in Maryborough?

Ms SPENCE: Of course, I do not want to comment on any specific cases. In general, a prisoner might be transferred because they are young. For example, it might be more suitable to transfer a 17-year-old boy to the boys section of Arthur Gorrie with other 17-year-olds. They might be transferred for disciplinary reasons. They might be transferred because our intelligence on that prisoner leads us to suspect that they are plotting something in their current environment. It would not be very often done for punitive reasons but more done for intelligence reasons. Perhaps for their own safety and welfare the authorities might determine that the current prison is unsuitable for them and they would be safer at another site. The safety and welfare of prisoners is obviously of great concern to the department.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: What is the appeal process?

Ms SPENCE: I will let the Director-General explain the appeal process.

Mr Rockett: There are a number of avenues through which prisoners can appeal and do appeal against decisions. One of them is simply through the delegations that exist within the department. So if the delegate was the Executive Director Custodial they could go to the higher level and eventually they could come to me. They could certainly go to the Ombudsman and seek the Ombudsman's intervention when they are unhappy about administrative decisions. They certainly have avenues open even through judicial review. In many aspects, they have the full range of avenues open to them to appeal against decisions as members of the public would have.

Mr HORAN: With regards to DNA testing of prisoners which has been under way since early 2002 when the act came into effect have all prisoners in Queensland correctional centres who have committed indictable offences had DNA tests or have any been released who were not tested?

Ms SPENCE: For the sampling period December 2000 to May 2004 a total of 5,482 samples were taken from prisoners in correctional centres. This information derived from the samples has been placed on the database for use by law enforcement agencies. There have been 247 matches with crime scenes so far using sample DNA. The DNA sampling process, as you know, involves taking a mouth swab. I understand that all prisoners who are serving a term of imprisonment for an indictable offence have had their samples taken.

Mr HORAN: So everyone who has committed an indictable offence has had a sample taken?

Ms SPENCE: That is right. I have more information that the answer is all prisoners.

Mr HORAN: So you said there were 5,482 samples taken.

Ms SPENCE: I have a bit more information on that I can give you.

Mr HORAN: Over those years there were about 5,600 prisoners a year in facilities with a fair turnover every year.

Ms SPENCE: We will take that on notice and get that checked. We will probably have the answer to that by the end of this session. I believe that all prisoners have had their DNA samples taken. I have talked to the two police officers who have been doing that job for a number of years now. I am pretty sure that is the case. We will get back to you on that.

Mr HORAN: Dot point two on page 3-2 of the MPS relates to the department's operations with regard to the management of illicit drug use. Can you tell us what quantities and value of drugs were found in correctional centres in 2003-04? How does this compare with the previous financial year?

Ms SPENCE: I think we will have to take the quantities on notice. We do not have it with us now.

Mr HORAN: I was after the value and quantities and a comparison with the previous year.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government questions is about to expire.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, I refer to page 3-8 of the MPS which discusses the replacement of the perimeter patrol vehicles. Can you advise why the new vehicles are needed?

Ms SPENCE: Earlier today I launched the new prototype perimeter patrol vehicle which we have been working on for the last 12 months. These are needed because the Hummers, which the Borbidge government introduced as a knee-jerk reaction to the Brendon Abbott escape in 1997, were very expensive and unsuitable vehicles for this purpose. They broke down continually. Most of the Hummers have been decommissioned. They are currently with Q-Fleet for disposal.

We will be using a Holden Rodeo car as the new perimeter patrol vehicle. It has been fitted with armour plating, protective glass, gun portholes and tyres that cannot be shot out. It is a very impressive vehicle. It will be on the road in the next few weeks. We are intending to test it in the Townsville prison to see how it meets North Queensland conditions and then we will test it in a prison in the south-east corner of the state before we order more of these vehicles for the future.

A committee comprising representatives from the Queensland Public Service Union and prison officers worked on the design specifications. I would particularly like to compliment Holden and a Gold Coast company Craig Ballistics—Mr English is nodding; he has obviously heard of this company—that provided protective armouredments for the vehicle. We are very confident that the vehicle will meet the specifications. Some prison officers who perform this work in the prisons had a look at it this morning. They were very pleased with the interior of the vehicle. They spend many hours patrolling the perimeters in these vehicles so it is important that they can do that in comfort but it is also important that they are very safe for the future. We are looking forward to the future testing of this vehicle and rolling them out early next year.

Mr FRASER: At page 3-20 of the MPS there is a discussion about achievements in correctional intervention services such as post-prison employment programs. Can you advise the committee what post-prison employment programs are available and how successful they have been?

Ms SPENCE: We recognise that a contributing factor to rehabilitation and the reduction in recidivism is the ability to obtain employment for prisoners after they are released. That is why we have put considerable energy and effort into the post-release employment assistance program that you just referred to which helps them find and maintain employment.

The government has been providing prisoners in south-east Queensland and Townsville employment through this service. In the last year 478 released prisoners gained employment—104 in Townsville and 374 in south-east Queensland. Of the 478 post-prisoner employment placements, 366 have remained gainfully employed for longer than three months.

Former prisoners who have accessed this service have lower rates of recidivism. In fact, the rates of recidivism for program participants is about 18 per cent compared to a rate of 32 per cent for those who have not participated in the program. Given the success of the program, I will review with the Minister for Employment and Training the possibility of expanding it in the near future. I think it is a great

opportunity to provide ex-prisoners with a fresh start and to minimise the possibility of them reoffending in the future.

Mr ENGLISH: Page 3-7 of the MPS makes reference to the Beattie government's record in keeping prisoners behind bars. Can you advise what role the Dog Squad plays in ensuring prison security and community safety?

Ms SPENCE: As you have mentioned, and as is noted in the MPS, since being elected in 1998 there has not been one escape from secure custody in any of our centres in Queensland. That is the lowest escape rate in 20 years and something that we can be justifiably proud of. The Dog Squad plays an important role in protecting the community and making sure our prisons are safe.

The Department of Corrective Services trains its own dogs and it has a special training complex at Wacol. We also have a number of recognised dog trainers who assist the members train their own dogs. The handlers are trained in detection methods in a variety of different surroundings. For the dog and the handler teams outside the south-east corner, the dogs are trained at the centre and are then accredited after their training is complete. In total, the department has 23 dogs and handlers in the mobile squad for south-east Queensland. Each prison in the rest of the state generally has five dogs and handler teams. The mobile squad provides support for Arthur Gorrie and Borallon prisons.

The dogs are general purpose dogs. They are used to patrol perimeters as well as escort services. They also undertake searches on locations, objects and people. Basically there are two types of dogs. The passive alert dogs, or sniffer dogs, are used to monitor drugs coming in and out of prisons and are also used to search the prison surrounds from time to time, and they are generally labradors or beagles. Then there are the active alert dogs which are used to search areas within the centres and indicate the presence of drugs by scratching and biting. Because of this, they are not used to search prisoners or visitors. They are generally of a German shepherd breed. I recently had the opportunity of seeing the active alert dog in action at Lotus Glen prison, and you would not want them to come too close to you. The dogs were put to use recently in Townsville where a prisoner who was being escorted to hospital escaped, and within minutes the dog had cornered the prisoner and he was subsequently apprehended. So the dogs are helpful in not only providing security to prison officers in the state generally but also detecting drugs within our centres.

The CHAIR: Minister, page 3-19 of the MPS states that prisoners conducted 526,000 hours of community service last financial year. What were the types of activities undertaken and the benefits to the community?

Ms SPENCE: Community service is provided in two ways. The first part of it is part of an offender's progression through the correctional system and the other is when the courts place offenders on community service orders and fine option orders. Last year there was an average of 12,807 offenders on community based orders who were supervised by community corrections. Of these, 3,620 were subject to community service and fine option orders. The overall successful completion rate for community service and fine option orders in the past 12 months was 73 per cent. Community organisations benefited by 526,000 hours of community service. Some of those organisations included the Queensland Ambulance Service, local councils, churches, sporting associations, schools, environmental groups, the RSPCA, cemeteries and welfare organisations such as Auscare and the Salvation Army. Each area office in northern and central Queensland has a community panel consisting of significant community members, including union representatives. These panels select and approve projects in their local community. In south-east Queensland, regional directors approve community service projects for court orders. Basically, we want to make sure that the projects that the community services people undertake do not compete with local businesses and they should only be undertaken for not-for-profit organisations. The same philosophy exists in our WORC outreach camps.

Mr FRASER: Minister, on page 3-2 of the MPS there is a reference to the \$1.5 million for upgrading the Woodford Correctional Centre which you touched on earlier. How will this funding assist the operation of the correctional centre?

Ms SPENCE: As we have said already, the Woodford centre has spare beds. When it was commissioned, the centre had 600 prisoner cells. That was the built capacity of the prison. This was increased in 2001 in order to manage the projected prisoner growth, and the centre now comprises 988 cells. Currently, 680 cells are funded and approved for use—that is, Woodford Correctional Centre has an operational capacity of 680. The remaining cells will become operational in line with increased demand through the growth in prisoner numbers. This year \$1.5 million will be used to fund an additional 64 cells at the centre, taking the operating capacity of Woodford to 744. Staffing levels at the centre will be adjusted to reflect the increased prisoner capacity. The gradual expansion in the operating capacity is part of the staged expansion program rather than the full-scale capacity utilisation.

A further \$1.5 million has been allocated this year and will be used to upgrade the officer stations at Woodford Correctional Centre, and this will provide fixed officer stations in the original cell blocks. These blocks were not provided with stations when the centre was constructed. Accordingly, the stations will be more secure. They are raised areas where the officers can observe prisoners. They have better lines of sight and they certainly provide greater security for the prison officers, who will have

access to desks and computer terminals. This is about the safety of the prison officers and also the prison generally.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, I refer to page 3-21 of the MPS which discusses sex offender programs. Can you advise the committee as to how many offenders completed the programs and how they benefit the community?

Ms SPENCE: We provide five different types of sex offender treatment programs. They include the sex offender treatment program which targets higher risk and need offenders, one which targets lower risk child sex offenders, and one which targets low risk sexual offenders who have violence and/or criminogenic need. We have a community corrections sex offender program for sexual offenders serving community based orders. We have an indigenous sex offender program obviously for indigenous people. In the last financial year, 65 offenders in custody and 58 offenders under community based orders completed a sex offender treatment program. There has been an increase in the number of programs delivered by the department in the last 12 months, and the department is constantly reviewing the effectiveness of the program.

Research suggests that offenders who are assessed as acutely psychotic or as having a current diagnosis of a mental illness or having an intellectual disability should be excluded from the program based on international research and practice evidence. Research also shows that the programs are not appropriate for offenders who categorically deny their offence. Therefore, in Queensland sex offenders are not forced to complete the course as they are likely to disrupt a group or negatively influence other participants and increase their own risk of reoffending. However, all serious sex offenders are assessed for their program needs and sentence management plans are developed to ensure that they have the opportunity to access the relevant programs.

The CHAIR: Minister, page 3-13 of the MPS refers to the drug court program. Can you advise the committee of some of the successes of the program and the positive impacts it has had on the community?

Ms SPENCE: Yes. We hear a lot about the drug courts and the success of them from the Attorney-General, but actually the Department of Corrective Services plays a very important role in the drug court program. Its role is to complete the assessment of offenders and provide case management services and also to provide offender programs. It has to provide advice to courts. It provides drug testing and surveillance. We provide intensive supervision of offenders on an intensive drug rehabilitation order. That is in phase 1 of the program. We also test the offenders, and they are tested at a rate of five times a fortnight. Sometimes they are tested even more frequently than that in higher risk situations. To assist the department in all of that testing, we have mobile drug testing vans attached to the program. These vans can go outside people's homes or people's workplaces and do on-the-spot testing. Otherwise, offenders are asked to come into one of our community correction offices for testing. Mr Rockett might want to comment a bit more on the success of this program. You have visited the one at Beenleigh.

Mr Rockett: I visited the Mount Gravatt regional office where people are located and also visited the community corrections side of the drug court trial in Townsville. Actually, at the Townsville experience we witnessed some drug offenders who had come into the building. I think the important thing about it and the success of it is that they continually come before the magistrate. I think the dialogue is fairly robust with both the magistrate and the community corrections officer who support and supervise this person. I think it is talking people through and drawing them to their own conclusions about the need to give up drugs completely. I think what the program does recognise is that in all drug programs there will be relapse, and that is what it is trialling—that is, that people can and will relapse and rather than go immediately back into a custodial centre they should go through stages and then get to a zero tolerance approach to drug taking. But certainly the community corrections officers working with Justice and Attorney-General people are very committed to the program.

Ms SPENCE: Thank you.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, I refer you to page 3-14 of the MPS which discusses videoconferencing facilities for the community corrections board. Can you advise of the success of this technology and the cost benefits to the department?

Ms SPENCE: I can. I think that videoconferencing has become very important in our prisons for two reasons. Firstly, it provides family visits for people who cannot get to the prisons who might live in western Queensland or indigenous communities in the north. But it is also very important in that it is linking the courts and the corrections boards to the prisoner. So it eliminates the need for a lot of prisoners to be transported to community corrections board meetings and also hopefully in the future—it has already started, but I think we are going to see a growth of this in the future—it will eliminate the need to transport prisoners into court sessions. Magistrates are using this more frequently.

Obviously there are huge cost savings in this from the government's point of view, but I am told that many prisoners would rather have their communication with a community corrections board via videoconferencing from the prison rather than go through the process of getting in the van and going to

the building in the city or in a regional location. They feel less intimidated by communicating with the board in surroundings with which they are familiar rather than unfamiliar surroundings, and that might be the board's office. So not only is it about cost and risk reduction in prisoner movements but it is probably a better way for many prisoners—perhaps not all—to get the business done of communicating with boards, communicating with courts and also maintaining contact with family members who cannot get to the prisons to meet them.

Through the Networking the Nation federally funded project, video linkages for family related purposes and also for Legal Aid purposes and assistance have been installed using standard videoconferencing equipment. The prisoner access project is the first formalised program of its type in Australia and, as I said, is particularly important for indigenous prisoners. I am keen to advance the use of videoconferencing in our prisons as much as we can and as much as is appropriate and to make sure that we have the appropriate equipment there for the purposes of courts, Legal Aid and family members.

The CHAIR: The time for government members' questions has expired.

Mr HORAN: Minister, I want to return to the overcrowding of the prisons. In south-east Queensland you seem to be basing your solution on the fact that we are going to be funding 64 more cell positions at Woodford, but let us look at the four major prisons in south-east Queensland. On the current figures as at 30 June 2004, Arthur Gorrie is well overcrowded. Borallon is almost at exactly 100 per cent. Sir David Longland is overcrowded—that is, more prisoners than it has capacity for. Wolston is almost at 100 per cent. You are saying that 64 beds will be the solution when you are already 76 over in those two prisons that are overcrowded at the moment. I also draw your attention to north Queensland where there are two prisons. At Lotus Glen there are 409 prisoners in a prison with a capacity of 396 and in Townsville there are 340 prisoners in a prison with a capacity of 324. How are you going to solve that problem there, particularly with regard to the policy of not moving prisoners and particularly indigenous prisoners away from their support base?

Ms SPENCE: On this table that you are referring to, one of the things that also stands out is the underutilisation of the open custodial centres—the Capricornia farm, the Numinbah men's, Palen Creek, the Townsville women's farm—

Mr HORAN: They have to go in there. You cannot put them in there just to solve your problems.

Ms SPENCE: I actually think that I have three minutes to answer this.

The CHAIR: Start the clock again.

Ms SPENCE: This is part of the issue. The fact is—and it is a cause of concern to me—that we have open custody facilities that are being very much underutilised in this state. It is a matter of when and how we transfer prisoners from secure custody to open custody. That, I think, is a challenge for us in the next 12 months—to more fully utilise these open custody facilities. This is a debate that I think that we need to have. We are reviewing the legislation in the next 12 months. I think that we have to ask ourselves why short-term prisoners—and most people are sentenced for a very short term; under six months—are not put into these open facilities. In fact, they serve their two months in a secure facility and we have these open facilities underutilised.

I am not talking about necessarily moving serious offenders into these open facilities, but I think that we have to ask ourselves why people who are sentenced for very short sentences, particularly for non-violent crimes, do not go into custody and serve 100 per cent of their sentences in secure custody. So yes, it is about management of our prisoners and how we move them through the system and which facility we place them in. The reality is that, this year, in secure custody the average daily rate was 4,380. Next year in Queensland, we are expecting an average daily rate of 4,490. As I said, we will have the beds to provide for 96 per cent occupancy in those secure facilities. But it is about management of the prisoners—moving some of our prisoners to the open custody centres and making sure that we do not have double-ups and overcrowding in our secure facilities.

Mr HORAN: Minister, with regard to sex offenders, can you tell us how many were released from prison in 2003-04 and how many of those did not complete the required sex offender program?

Ms SPENCE: The participation rate for custodial centres in 2001-02 was 76. In 2002-03, there were 94. In 2003-04, 109 prisoners participated. Completion rates for those same years were 42, 54 and 65. So on those figures, you have some idea of the participation and completion rates. To just give you some comparisons, in 2002-03, 277 sexual offenders were released from Queensland correctional centres and 75 of these were released on a community based order requiring the offender to report to a Corrective Services officer. From 1 July 2003 to 18 June 2004, 289 sex offenders were released from Queensland correctional centres and 72 of these were released on a community based order requiring the offender to report to a Corrective Services officer.

The following figures indicate the number of sexual offenders released to prison, probation, home detention or parole whose failure to comply with conditions were so serious that the order was revoked from the sentencing authority or Community Corrections Board or a warrant was issued for their return

to court. In 2001-02, 12 offenders had their order revoked. In 2002-03, nine offenders had their orders revoked. In the last financial year, four offenders had their orders revoked.

Mr HORAN: The question was actually how many of those were released—and you gave us the numbers released—who had not participated or did not complete the sex offender programs. Going by the earlier figures that you gave us about participation and so forth, there is probably only one in six of those prisoners being released who would have completed a sex offender program?

Ms SPENCE: Look, I am not sure whether we have those figures here today, but I am happy to get them to you. You have been given how many prisoners start the program and complete the program. But that is not really how many sex offenders there are in our prisons. So it is hard to make that comparison. That is probably what you want—what percentage of our sex offenders are actually completing programs. That is what you are really after, I think.

Mr HORAN: Of the 289 who were released in 2004 and the 277 who were released in 2002-03, how many of those would have completed the sex offender program?

Ms SPENCE: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice. There is no cover-up in them. What you need to know is how many sex offenders are in our prisons on an annual basis, how many start the program, and how many complete the program and the percentages. We are happy to give you those figures.

Mr HORAN: Really, it was in the last two years. Of the numbers who had been released, how many of those who had completed the program.

Ms SPENCE: Sure. We have a serious sex offenders committee comprising the director-general and members of other agencies. They meet twice a year and discuss each case of a serious sex offender who is about to be released within 12 months or two years before they get released and whether those offenders have started or completed programs and whether we are likely to apply to the Attorney-General for a section 19 order under the Criminal Law Amendment Act to be placed on those prisoners after their release. So we pay a lot of attention, particularly to the serious sex offenders in our prisons—where they are going, what they are doing and, obviously, looking after them and keeping a watchful eye on them after they leave the prison. I am happy to provide that information.

Mr HORAN: Thank you. On page 3-8 of the MPS there is mention of enhanced surveillance systems for the monitoring of foreign or unauthorised matter were being installed in correctional centres for the screening of laundry prior to being processed by prisoners. Has every correctional centre been fitted out with such an enhanced surveillance system?

Ms SPENCE: They are getting them. We have ordered them in all the secure prisons that have laundry industries. X-ray scanning equipment for Townsville, Sir David Longland and Lotus Glen correctional centres was installed and fully operational by 9 June. We have ordered them for the other prisons. I do not know that we have any more information on whether they have been installed yet in the other prisons, but certainly the X-ray scanning equipment has been ordered for all secure prisons that operate laundries in the state to prevent an incident as occurred in Sir David Longland ever occurring again.

Besides this X-ray scanning equipment, we have also put in new protocols with the hospitals, particularly the Gold Coast Hospital, for how the laundry is prepared before it is taken to the prisons. So new procedures are in place to make sure that an incident of that nature certainly does not occur again.

Mr HORAN: Minister, there is a program to provide drug testing facilities in community connections area offices. Can you tell us how many area offices there are throughout Queensland and how many of those have the drug testing facilities or require drug testing facilities?

Ms SPENCE: We have 33 area offices in the state. Approximately 70 per cent of the community corrections area offices now have in-house drug testing facilities. Twenty-one additional staff have been recruited and trained to undertake on-site drug testing. A review of infrastructure requirements, including drug testing facilities for the remaining area offices, will be included as part of the department's future capital works program.

A mobile drug testing van was commissioned in November 2002. This van provides the facility to conduct urine drug testing of offenders both inside and outside business hours, including weekends and public holidays. The van also conducts testing at area offices that do not currently have access to a drug testing facility.

Approximately 12 per cent of all community based orders currently have the urinalysis requirement. On average, 900 urinalysis tests are conducted each month throughout the state on offenders subject to community based orders and that is excluding the drug court offenders who I was talking about before. This initiative enables staff to detect and respond to illicit drug use, confront offenders about the consequences of their substance abuse, and to implement appropriate intervention, including breach action.

Mr HORAN: Minister, in that answer you said that 70 per cent have drug testing facilities and that you are going to undertake a review. Are the others going to have drug testing facilities in them or does

the review mean that some may and some will not? Is it going to be 100 per cent all area offices or not and is there a timetable for it?

Ms SPENCE: As I said, the van conducts testing at the area offices that do not currently have access to drug testing facilities. One of the things that has slowed down the process has been the design of the area offices. You really have to have the space to undertake this urinalysis testing. The facilities must include dedicated interview rooms with computer access to the department's intranet site, duress alarm systems, CCTV coverage, a urinalysis testing room that enables the department to undertake drug testing of offenders without having to engage external providers and access for disabled offenders as well. We have a budget of \$1.4 million next year for the area office upgrades. Once that is completed, we are expecting that all of those area offices will have the facilities to undertake that drug testing

Mr HORAN: So that means basically by the end of the year? I was just thinking that the mobile van would do a few kilometres at the moment if those centres are spread all over the state—unless they are in south-east Queensland.

Ms SPENCE: They will be in south-east Queensland.

Mr HORAN: I have a question about the food contamination case at the Townsville Correctional Centre. Does the department have any concern regarding the preparation of prison officers' food by prisoners? I see that you are endeavouring to overcome that by trying to have a continuous watch by guards of the preparation of meals by prisoners. It would seem a fairly fundamental weakness in the system that prisoners are preparing meals for prison officers, which could be very easily contaminated in a malicious way.

Ms SPENCE: Obviously, we take any allegations about the contamination of food very seriously. Officers are entitled to have meals that are not contaminated. It is in the enterprise bargaining agreement that officers are entitled to have free meals, but I would have to stress that officers are not required to; they are free to bring their own lunch, dinner, breakfast or their own eating requirements to work just like any other worker in Queensland. So they are not obliged to eat the prison food.

After the Townsville allegations this year, which I understand were not substantiated, the department did a review of how the food was being prepared at the Townsville Correctional Centre. I understand that centre upgraded the number of officers who are watching over the cooks in the Townsville kitchen.

Yes, we do take it very seriously, but it is common practice that the prison officers eat the prison food that is prepared by prisoners. We do not employ professional cooks in our prisons to cook special meals for prison officers.

Mr HORAN: Minister, I would like to ask you about the funding for the sex offender programs. There has been a roll-out of the indigenous sex offender programs, as well as more staff being trained to facilitate these programs. Can you give us the budgeted amounts and the actual amounts for 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05?

Ms SPENCE: Indigenous ones?

Mr HORAN: No, for the sex offender program itself. The point I made about the indigenous program is that that is a new and additional part of it, which should require some substantial extra funding.

Ms SPENCE: I am sure we have those figures. We are looking for the amounts of money we have spent on sex offender programs for the last three years?

Mr HORAN: Yes.

Ms SPENCE: We will take it on notice.

Mr HORAN: The point of the question is that the indigenous sex offender program has now been included in it, which should mean a substantial increase in that funding.

Ms SPENCE: Okay.

Mr HORAN: Minister, how many sex offenders are presently waitlisted to participate in the program? How many of these have been waitlisted for over 12 months?

Ms SPENCE: I am just seeing if we have those figures. We will take that question on notice.

Mr FRASER: Minister, staffing numbers for the department are canvassed at page 3-6 of the MPS. Can you please detail what effect the increase in staff numbers is having on custodial corrections?

Ms SPENCE: The department had several significant staffing movements during the 2003-04 financial year. The movements included a decrease in some areas. For example, there were 66 staff transferred to Partner One and CorpTech as part of the whole-of-government shared service initiative, so there was a reduction of staff in that area. All staff moved as a result of the shared service initiative retained employment in their respective agencies. It should be noted that staff employed for the community enforcement enhancement program, home detention program and electronic monitoring

initiatives, which have since been disbanded, were mostly temporary secondments from within the department.

In the 2004-05 financial year the department has forecast a net increase of 24 staff in total. This is attributed to an increase of approximately 31 staff in association with the expansion of the operations of Woodford Correctional Centre. Changes which came about as a result of the initiatives for the community enhancement project and home detention with electronic monitoring are directly reflected in the community services supervision. So we are seeing some of those staff being redeployed into that particular area, which is good news for that particular division of the department.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, page 3-19 of the MPS discusses correctional intervention services. Can you advise the committee what programs are available to offenders to ensure they are given the best chance of rehabilitation?

Ms SPENCE: Earlier I talked about the importance the government places on post-prison employment programs as a means of rehabilitation reducing recidivism. We have also developed more than 13 rehabilitation programs that target sexual violence and drug related offending behaviours in the prisons. I will just go through these, because I think there is an extraordinary list of programs that people probably have not given much thought to in the past.

We have cognitive skill programs which provide offenders with thinking skills that will influence their self-control, critical reasoning, problem solving and perspective taking. We have anger management programs, obviously to control aggressive behaviours. We have substance abuse and preventing and managing relapse programs, which obviously talk about substance abuse. We have violence intervention programs for aggressive and violent offenders. We have an Ending Offending program, which is particularly aimed at drinking offending behaviour of indigenous offenders. We have the Ending Family Violence program to reduce indigenous domestic violence. We have the transition program, which facilitates prisoners' integration into the community. We have the substance abuse program, which is an intensive program for offenders with addictions. And we have the five different sex offender programs that I mentioned earlier. While there is a lot of focus from time to time, in the parliament and other places, on sex offender programs, the department is obviously addressing a lot of different reasons for people's offending behaviour.

The department also offers a number of adult education and vocational education and training programs delivered in partnership with the Department of Employment and Training. We offer literacy and numeracy and secondary and tertiary education. Vocational training subject areas include courses in furnishing, engineering, horticulture, first aid, computers, hospitality, fitness, asset maintenance and occupational health and safety. Successful completion rates for vocational education and training are currently at 78 per cent. Additionally, there are courses offered in indigenous art, culture, environment and community studies.

There are of course a number of community based, non-departmental programs and services which provide support to offenders to remain free from offending. As well, we encourage people such as Alcoholics Anonymous to visit our prisons and deliver programs. I think that gives some idea of the range of programs offered in our correctional facilities to address reoffending behaviour.

The CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 3-19 of the MPS, which discusses the western outreach camp WORC program. Can you advise what benefits this program had for which communities?

Ms SPENCE: We have 11 camps throughout Queensland. I am pleased to have visited the Charleville WORC outreach camp earlier this year. That of course was the first camp to be established in Queensland after the 1990 floods and, I understand, the first of its kind in the whole of Australia. Since the Charleville camp was set up, the 11 camps have been established at Yuleba, Mitchell, St George, Dirranbandi, Springsure, Clermont, Blackall, Winton, Boulia and Julia Creek. The women's program also operates a camp at Warwick. All of these camps have been of considerable success and benefit to all of the participants.

I am told—certainly the people at Charleville told me—that the prisoners are welcomed into the community. In fact, the mayor and the townspeople I spoke to and the committee of townspeople who advise the WORC outreach camp want more of those prisoners in their community because they see the work they are doing as so valuable. They are even doing things such as visiting the old people's home and tending the gardens, and they make friends with the elderly people. So it is not just about giving them a work ethic; it is also about giving them a sense that they belong to the community and that there are people in the community who are prepared to accept them.

During the last year prisoners on community work orders completed around 60,000 hours of community service, with a total dollar value of approximately \$1 million. The women's program is currently contributing to the restoration of the Uniting Church at Warwick, painting the perimeter fence of the historic Glengallen Homestead and assisting in preparation and catering for an up-and-coming polocrosse event.

Many of these prisoners report that their experience in the WORC outreach camp has been a life-changing event. Some of them have returned to those western communities, to live and work in those

communities. What I would like to see in the next 12 months—it would be my challenge—is the establishment of a WORC outreach camp in north Queensland. As you can see from those locations, they are all in western Queensland at the moment. I think we should be providing those kinds of services in north Queensland a bit more for indigenous offenders and see if we can make a success of them.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, page 3-5 of the MPS notes a significant increase in assets and the reduction in debt. Can you advise how the department has achieved this?

Ms SPENCE: The department's financial position has greatly improved in the past 12 months. From 30 June 1999 to 19 January 2002 the department took out a total of \$301 million in loans to fund the construction of new prisons and the extension of existing prisons. This is illustrated on page 3-26 of the MPS, in the capital acquisition statement.

In May 2004 the Beattie government approved the utilisation of available cash balances in the consolidated fund to redeem the department's loans and allocated approximately \$192 million to supplement existing allocations for this purpose. That means that the department loans were paid out in full on 31 May 2004, with a total repayment of \$196.602 million. This I think clearly demonstrates the government's responsible fiscal management for Queensland and the fact that we are in a very healthy position for the future.

Mr FRASER: Minister, at page 3-8 of the MPS there is a reference to the integrated justice information system. Can you please advise the committee how this will help the department manage inmates and assist the people of Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: The IJIS project involves the electronic transfer of bench charge sheets and QP9s from Police to Justice. Implementation is planned to commence in February 2005. The measurable benefits to the department are that ultimately it will result in fewer administrative tasks. Because it will include electronic access to court appearances it will result in the automatic notification of Queensland police of offenders released to community supervision. The whole IJIS project has been a considerable one for the department. I might just pass now to the director-general to comment further on its development.

Mr Rockett: The Queensland criminal justice system spans a number of agencies, including Police, Justice, Corrections and the Department of Communities, and involves a chain of activities from the reporting of a crime or complaint through to the management of both custodial and community based orders. The purpose of IJIS is to improve community safety by sharing information and increasing collaboration in the criminal justice system. There is a chief executive officers law and justice committee that oversees the IJIS project, which I am chairing on behalf of the Law and Justice Group. The IJIS program will be executed as a series of annual multiagency projects designed to gradually introduce business and technology change to the criminal justice system.

The Department of Corrective Services will gain the following system functionality from the government's investment in the system: verdicts and judgment records from the lower jurisdiction courts; automated upload of Magistrates Court results to the integrated offender management system, which the Department of Corrective Services is developing; notification of relevant court orders to custodial and community operations; and query access to relevant court documentation.

The department is planning an active role in the development of solutions within the IJIS initiative which will improve the quality and time lines of information used in making decisions about the management of offenders. Benefits from the initial stages of the IJIS program will include access to bench charge sheets, court appearances and court results information, which we believe will go live early next year.

Mr ENGLISH: I refer to page 3-2 of the MPS which deals with factors that will influence the Department of Corrective Services' operations, which includes the management of illicit drugs. Can you advise the committee how the department minimises the accessibility and the use of illicit drugs by offenders?

Ms SPENCE: I think in our present system we are very good at the detection of drugs. In fact, we have one of the best results in Australia because the current annual data shows the average positive test rate for the rest of Australia was 9.36 per cent, with New South Wales recording 11.1 per cent, Western Australia 11.4 per cent and South Australia 11.8 per cent, and in Queensland it was just four per cent. So we are pretty good at detection, and we have a number of ways to detect drugs in prisons and keep drugs out of prisons, and they include regular checks on visitors and ion scan drug detection devices. We have, as I said before, the passive alert detection dogs. We have an automated prisoner telephone system to provide intelligence because all prisoner conversations can be listened into. We search prisoners following contact visits. We do random and targeted drug tests of prisoners. We do random searches of prisoners cells to ensure that anything does not slip through. Of the approximately 5,000 cells in use in Queensland, approximately 445 cells are searched daily, which equates to over 160,000 searches each year. So we are working very hard and making sure that drugs are kept out of our prisons.

Equally as important is the issue of the treatment of drug offenders, and we have a variety of programs, as I mentioned before, that are aimed at treating drug offenders in our prisons. We have also a methadone treatment program that has been trialled in Townsville and Brisbane Women's. We have a drug free accommodation unit at Arthur Gorrie which accommodates selected offenders who sign an agreement to remain drug free and undertake an abstinence based drug treatment program, and we have also trialled drug therapy management plans for prisoners who test positive to a drug to be managed in accordance with their individualised plans. Not only is the government and the department very serious about detecting drugs and keeping them out of prisons; we have a responsibility to treat drug dependent prisoners and send them out of prison healthier and drug free.

The CHAIR: Minister, page 3-3 of the MPS discusses child protection. Can you advise what positive outcomes the department has achieved in protecting our children and enhancing community safety?

Ms SPENCE: When we talk about child protection, people do not necessarily think about the Department of Corrective Services and its role in the child protection system, but we have five categories of children who come in contact with the correctional system who need to be taken into account, and they are the 17-year-old offenders in our custodial facilities. They are preschool aged children who are accommodated with their mothers in custody. There are child visitors to custodial centres and there are children who live with offenders who are under supervision or who are likely to be associated with an offender upon release, and there are children who are substantially at risk because of the release of a sex offender.

The department, because it is also an intelligence gathering body, has a very important role to play in the whole child protection system. I think it takes that responsibility seriously. For example, strict procedures are in place to ensure that visiting times or areas where child sex offenders receive visits are separate from other prisoners, and that ensures that child sex offenders are not provided with any further opportunity to reoffend or get to know children who might be visiting in prisons. So seriously are we looking at this issue that we are going to create a new position—a child safety position—in the department, and I might ask the director-general to comment more on that position.

Mr Rockett: Under the child protection legislation there is a number of departments that are described as prescribed entities, and the Department of Corrective Services is one of those. As the minister said, Corrective Services has, I guess, a strong association in protecting children from abuse and neglect, and it has been outlined clearly the range of offenders that we have and the associations that these offenders and networks have with children.

To ensure that we have a single-point contact both to the Department of Child Safety and to the children's commissioner, we will be advertising in about a week's time, as the other prescribed entities have, a position at senior officer level called child protection officer, and that will be an independent position that will report directly to me. But with all issues, allegations, suspicions of any associations or concerns about child abuse or child neglect that we come across within our own agency it will be mandatory to report to that child protection officer who through me will report that to both the children's commissioner and the Department of Child Safety.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: Minister, on page 3-2 of the MPS it discusses factors that will affect the department. Can you advise what interventions were successful in targeting the factors that contribute to an offender's criminal behaviour?

Ms SPENCE: One of the factors I would like to talk about in this question is the tool that the department uses to assess prisoners when they come into the system, and that tool is called the offender risk needs inventory or ORNI for short. So anyone who comes into the custodial system is assessed by the department using this tool for their likely offending behaviour. The tool uses a set of criteria to formulate a profile about a prisoner. So it looks at the criminal history, it looks at the education and employment levels of the prisoner, it looks at past alcohol and drug abuse, it looks at the prisoner's recreational activities, their relationships and criminal associations, and it looks at their social attitudes.

This is a unique tool, although other states have their own tools, and the department is constantly reassessing the tool to make sure that it is equitable, that it is less ambiguous, that it has a greater focus on gender and cultural issues and that it is applicable for the needs of officers who work in the corrective system. Once the department has determined the prisoner's profile, it can then deal with a case management plan for that prisoner more effectively.

Mr HORAN: The Department of Corrective Services was to participate in a national trial to try to block mobile phone reception in prisons with Queensland participating. Has that trial taken place?

Ms SPENCE: The answer to your question is that the trial has not taken place because the Commonwealth will not agree to it. The states' corrective service ministers put this on the corrective services ministers conference. It has been on the conference agenda for some time now. I have to say that the issue of illegal mobile phones in prisons is something that is of great concern, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria. We do not seem so far to have the same problems with mobile phones in our own prisons. That is not to say that we will not have it in the future but we do not seem to have

that problem. I can give you a figure. For example, in the period from May 2001 to April 2004 there were 18 incidents directly related to mobile phones in prisons, which is a pretty low figure compared to southern states. However, we do not know if that good figure will continue in the future, and I suspect we only have that low figure because we have very good detection processes for people and getting into our prisons.

But it is a very serious issue, and the state ministers are very disappointed that the Commonwealth government will not work with the states on this issue of mobile phones. It is likely that mobile phones will be used in terrorist situations in the future. We already know that they have been used to activate bombs. We all know that mobile phones are getting smaller and the likelihood of them being able to find their way into prisons is probably greater as the phones get smaller. So it is something that the states are continuing to talk to the federal government about. We did set up a national committee to look at this issue to see if there is any world technology that can point us in a direction for the future.

Mr HORAN: With regards to the transition program, outside of available literature which reported on common issues facing offenders, are you concerned that there is not a standardised level of accurate information being provided to offenders in their transition back into the community?

Ms SPENCE: Could you say that again?

Mr HORAN: Page 3-20 of the MPS refers to the department piloting a transitions program and that has commenced preparations for implementation. Do you have a standardised level of accurate information being provided to offenders in their transition back into the community other than the provision of literature?

Ms SPENCE: I have to confess I do not know much about this pilot. I might find someone here who does. I might ask Gabrielle Sinclair up to the table.

Ms Sinclair: The transitions program is a new program that we have developed over the last two years to standardise prerelease programs for all prisoners across the state. The transitions program is specially targeted at assisting prisoners to find accommodation, to find employment and to find community based services that will help them to remain crime free. We are very keen to make sure that prisoners on release are assisted because international research indicates that recidivism is less likely to occur if newly released prisoners have accommodation, have employment assistance and have sustainable housing and work.

Ms SPENCE: Madam Chair, I would just like to report that we could, if you would like us to, answer questions that we took on notice on DNA, statistics on drug testing and the number of people waitlisted for sex offenders. I do not know how you want to deal with that.

The CHAIR: I will leave that up to the member for Toowoomba South. You have a few more minutes until we close.

Mr HORAN: If there is some time left at the end, we could do that. I think I only have one more question.

The CHAIR: Well, there is only one minute left.

Mr HORAN: In that one minute left I will ask a question. In a reply to one of our questions on notice it advised that the department has completed 29 audits for the 2003-04 financial year. In addition, there are at least two other major audits that were not reported here—the two that we spoke about in the first question that I asked. Minister, 29 audits plus these other two are a lot of audits. Are you concerned that this number of audits indicates some fundamental problem within the department? It seems to be an enormous number of audits to be under way in that period of time.

Ms SPENCE: It is more likely we have a very busy and hardworking internal audit team. I have looked at the list. Most of those audits were quite minor in nature and would have been conducted by the internal audit team. That is their job to do that kind of auditing. I am not concerned about that.

Mr HORAN: So the only other audits that were undertaken were those two that we mentioned early on to do with the management of correctional services and—

Ms SPENCE: They are audits that I have asked the department to do—those two that you are talking about. The ones that you are talking about—I have them now—are the result generally of internal audits. I do not have a problem with the normal process of people looking at the expenditure, the use of corporate cards, payroll analysis, payroll administration and information system backups. That is what you pay these people to do.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government questions has expired, but if you would like to report back on some of the answers to those questions then you do not have to do them on notice, Minister.

Ms SPENCE: Thank you. Firstly, in respect to DNA testing, all prisoners in custody were tested in the period December 2001 to May 2003. This included all prisoners convicted of an indictable offence but did not include remandees. Remandees make up approximately 20 per cent of the prison population at any one time. Since December 2001, police have captured DNA upon admission to the watch-house.

Further, since 23 June 2004 testing has commenced of offenders on post-prison community based release. This will capture a number of the remainder of the prisoners who missed out in the 2001-03 period. That is that one.

The statistics on drug testing while serving a custodial sentence: some 3,800 tests have been conducted since 1999. No-one is caught via this program as the random testing is a monitoring system. It is not intended to identify specific individuals; individual identification is done through a separate targeted testing program. The random testing program was successful as a monitoring system and provides a deterrent effect. The results of the random testing indicate a continuing decrease in drug usage. The estimated level of drug use has declined from an initial survey in 1996. The average then was 17.9 per cent. As I said before, to the end of April this year we have had a 4 per cent rate. I think that shows that we have significantly reduced the drug usage in our prisons. That is that one.

The number of people who are waitlisted on sex offender programs, for your information, was tabled as a question on notice to Mr Langbroek. It was asked on 18 June 2004. The answer is that there are currently 177 offenders in custody who have been waitlisted to participate in sex offender programs for 12 months or less. Of those offenders, 98 have been on waiting lists less than six months and 79 offenders have been on waiting lists between six months and 12 months. Offenders who are waitlisted for the program have been assessed as suitable for participation.

A further 152 offenders remain on the waiting lists and have done so for more than 12 months. The greater majority of this group have either been declined to participate on the programs, have mental health issues or have a post-prison community based release date that is too far into the future for current participation. I think that is a very important point. I want to stress that point because it is something I have been discussing with the department. Some of these sex offenders are in prisons for very long sentences. It is believed that providing the sex offender program towards the end of their sentence is more effective than providing it initially. A lot of those people who are on waiting lists will not get the sex offender program until they are in the second half of their sentence. They apply for it in the first half thinking that it might progress them through the system; it will not. They lose the effectiveness of it in the first half of their sentence.

The CHAIR: That brings the committee's examination of estimates for the Police and Corrective Services portfolio to a close. Thank you, Minister, and advisers for assisting us today. I would like to thank Hansard, the attendants and research staff for their valuable assistance. Thanks also to the committee members for their participation today. That also concludes the committee's consideration of the matters parliament referred to it on 18 June.

Ms SPENCE: I would like to place on record my thanks to the staff of the Department of Corrective Services for the hard work that they have done in developing the briefs for the estimates and the whole estimates process. I think they have done very well.

The CHAIR: They have.

Mr HORAN: On behalf of the non-government section, thank you very much to all the staff and to you, Minister.

Ms SPENCE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.19 p.m.