

TUESDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2012

ESTIMATES—COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY—LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AND PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES


Estimates Committee Members

Hon. FS Simpson (Chair)
Mr TS Mulherin
Hon. TJ Nicholls
Mr CW Pitt
Mrs DC Scott
Hon. JW Seeney
Mr RA Stevens

In Attendance

Mr N Laurie, Clerk of the Parliament
Mr M Ries, Deputy Clerk
Mr M Hickey, Director of Corporate and House Services
Mr C Atkinson, Manager, Financial and Administrative Services

Committee met at 9.00 am

 **CHAIR:** I declare the public meeting of the Committee of the Legislative Assembly open. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. On behalf of the committee I welcome members of parliament and members of the public to the hearing. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. I am Fiona Simpson, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and chair of the committee. The other members of the committee are: Mr Tim Mulherin, Deputy Leader of the Opposition; the honourable Tim Nicholls, Treasurer and Minister for Trade as the Premier's nominee; Mr Curtis Pitt, Manager of Opposition Business; Mrs Desley Scott, member for Woodridge as the delegate for Ms Annastacia Palaszczuk, Leader of the Opposition; the honourable Jeff Seeney, Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning; and Ray Stevens, Manager of Government Business. Also present at the table is the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie, as CEO of the Parliamentary Service; Mr Michael Ries, Deputy Clerk, Mr Michael Hickey, Director of Corporate and House Services; and Mr Craig Atkinson, Manager of Financial and Administrative Services.

In relation to media coverage, the committee has resolved to allow television coverage during the hearing. The committee has also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Service website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. At this meeting the committee will take questions from any member of the Legislative Assembly in relation to the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2012 for the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Service. The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. I ask that mobile phones or pagers be either switched off or switched to silent mode. I now declare the expenditure for the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Service open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Can members wishing to ask questions come forward to the microphones and state their name for Hansard. Once members have finished asking the questions can they please move back to the gallery to allow other members to come forward. I now ask members for questions.

Mrs Miller: I refer Madam Speaker to an article in the *Brisbane Times* on 23 May 2012, which I table for the benefit of the committee, which quotes the Deputy Premier explaining the reason for his move to the Bernays Room. He said, 'The move came about because the Speaker needed more space for staff.'

I ask the Speaker would she please outline how many more officers are on her staff, what extra space was required for her staff, did her staff move into any offices formerly occupied by ministers or was this simply a ruse by the Deputy Premier to gain access to the Bernays Room accommodation?

CHAIR: I will answer aspects with regard to my staff and my resources as the Speaker. The Speaker is not responsible for accommodation allocation in the precinct. I clarified in late May that I was not seeking additional office space, merely the restoration of office space that had been removed from the Speaker's staff during the time between the election being called and the commencement of the 54th parliament. Under changes to the Parliamentary Service Act and the Parliament of Queensland Act the Speaker is not involved in allocation of rooms in the precinct. The Speaker also has not increased the number of staff that are employed in the office of the Speaker.

As I previously have mentioned, it is the common practice of the Speaker to seek the advice of the Clerk on this matter, but you also referred to the Deputy Premier in your question and I will give the Deputy Premier the opportunity to also respond.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Member for Bundamba, it would not surprise you at all to know that the quote that you referred to from the newspaper is not entirely accurate. It is certainly not an accurate reporting of what I said. Leaving that aside, the whole issue that you are trying to re-prosecute about the use of the Bernays Room is one that was discussed, if you like, in the parliament, but it was also discussed in the term of the previous government of which you were a member. You are well enough aware that it was a recommendation that was made at the time that that area, being largely unused, be taken up as additional office space. The costs that were involved were discussed in the parliament and I question whether or not this opportunity that you have to ask questions should be used to re-prosecute arguments that have been well and truly prosecuted in the parliament.

Mrs Miller: Madam Speaker?

CHAIR: We will move on to another member and then come back to the member for Bundamba.

Mr Crandon: I note SDS page 4 refers to one of the highlights of 2011-12 for the Parliamentary Service being the implementation of the new committee system. Can you advise of the outcomes achieved under the new system, including engagement by stakeholders and how the Parliamentary Service has supported the new system?

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk of the Parliament to answer this question.

Mr Laurie: From August 2011 each of the new seven portfolio committees that were established by the parliament held simultaneous meetings in the parliamentary precinct. Revised sessional orders provided for Wednesday morning of sitting weeks to be dedicated to committee business with the emphasis being on committees holding hearings and briefings that are open to members of the public to attend. The full program of all upcoming committee meetings, hearings and briefings is published on the parliament's internet site during the week prior to each sitting week with stakeholders also advised of the upcoming program.

I am able to inform members that from 2011 to 2012 a total of 124 committee hearings and briefings were held, with 106 of these being open to the public. Additionally, there were 174 committee meetings held, making a total of 298 committee meetings, hearings and briefings held during the year. This is a dramatic increase in the level of committee business and is remarkable when compared with figures from previous years where a total of 29 committee meetings and hearings were held in 2009-10 and 37 were held in 2010-11. As a gauge of the level of consultation undertaken, a total of 391 public servants and similar officers and 239 community members or stakeholder group representatives appeared before the committee hearings and briefings in 2011-12. For the period of 2 August 2011 to the end of June 2012, a total of 57 bills were examined by the seven portfolio committees.

I might just stop there and say that in an analysis that we had done for the committee examining the committee system, we noted that over almost a decade before only about four bills in the whole decade had gone to committees for examination, yet during that period August 2011 to 2012 57 bills were examined by committees. So it was a dramatic change.

The dissolution of the parliament on 20 February for an election on 24 March intervened with the Assembly not returning until 15 May 2012. There were 23 bill inquiries that lapsed upon the dissolution. Of those 57 bills examined by portfolio committees during 2011-12, 28 of these were debated and voted on by the House during this period and six were ongoing as at 30 June 2012. A total of 29 amendments were made to these 28 bills by the House as a result of committee recommendations in their reports. In

addition, a total of 22 non-legislative amendments were also accepted in the period. That gives some indication of the sort of activity undertaken by committees during the period which the Parliamentary Service, through the committee office and Hansard and other areas, has actually supported.

Mr Gulley: SDS page 4 mentions the induction program for the 54th parliament that, no doubt with the number of new members, threw up some challenges. Can the CLA advise how the program was implemented and how its success or otherwise was measured?

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk of the Parliament to answer this question.

Mr Laurie: The 51 new members of the 54th parliament attended the 2012 induction program in April and May of this year. As members would understand, the increased number of new members made this induction particularly challenging. As a result of feedback received from the 2009 induction and earlier induction programs, the program was divided into two parts over four days. The first part of the program focused on administrative matters, members entitlements, legal obligations and responsibilities of MPs. These were essentially the matters that we had identified as being the things that new members particularly wanted to know first up, if you like. This was held three weeks after the general election. We had to hold it about three weeks after the general election because obviously we had to wait for the return of all the election results.

The second part focused on providing information on the practices and procedures in the Assembly and this was held the week before the opening of parliament. One of the feedback items that we had received in earlier inductions was that we had given members induction where we would go through parliamentary practices and procedures, but as in every new parliament there is a certain lag between the election and the new parliament coming back, by the time the parliament came back most of that information had already been forgotten by the new members. So we tried to hold that second part dealing with parliamentary practice and procedure closer to the opening of parliament.

A one-stop shop was trialed during part A and representatives from various service areas, including catering, human resources, information security, property services, financial and admin services and the clerk's office, were involved in a two-hour workshop where members could ask questions and receive additional information. Members also had their individual photos taken at the same time for the historical records. It was held in the Premier's Hall. This was actually viewed as a very successful part of the program and the first time we had ever done it.

A confidential email service was set up for members to send additional queries to and they were answered accordingly. As part of the feedback process, new members were asked if there were any specific issues that they would like further information on and a follow-up question and answer session was conducted on 12 July 2001. By and far this was probably the most comprehensive new members' induction process that we had been through in recent times and, in fact, ever.

Mrs Miller: Madam Speaker?

CHAIR: I will go to the next member and we will come back to the member for Bundamba. Are there any further questions? Member for Greenslopes?

Mr Kaye: The SDS on page 4 refers to the live broadcast of committee hearings. Can you advise the measurement of the success or otherwise of the viewing of those broadcasts?

CHAIR: I will ask the clerk to answer this question.

Mr Laurie: On 24 August 2011 the first committee hearing was broadcast live via the parliament's internet site. The online committee broadcast system was subsequently upgraded to facilitate the simultaneous broadcasting of up to three live committee hearings, the Legislative Assembly and Council chambers and the Dandair Room commencing from 6 June onwards. Following the live broadcast of each committee hearing the footage remains on the parliament's internet site for a period of time and is able to be watched on replay. For the period August 2011 to the end of June 2012 a total of 24 committee hearings were broadcast live on the parliament's internet site. For those hearings held in May and June 2012 when the online viewer statistics commenced, there were a total of 7,992 live views and 3,384 replayed views of the archived hearing's broadcast.

The broadcast of committee hearings initiative continued the parliament's commitment to openness and transparency and followed on from the broadcast of the parliament project that had commenced in 2003. The three new committee rooms on level 6 are also being fitted out with broadcast infrastructure which will allow for up to six committee hearings to be simultaneously broadcast into the future.

Mrs Miller: Just for the benefit of the members here, as this is the first time that this has actually occurred, is it going to be the case here this morning—this is not my question, I just want your ruling on it—that the opposition will only receive one fifth of the questions going to the CLA?

CHAIR: This is a procedural question. The determination was that any member of the Legislative Assembly can ask questions and so all members of parliament are actually entitled to ask a question.

Mrs Miller: Excuse me—

CHAIR: I will ask the Deputy Premier to respond.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you. I think in considering the question that the member for Bundamba has put forward, it is as well to reflect on the way that this committee came about and what this committee is supposed to be.

Mrs Miller: I am well aware of that.

Mr SEENEY: As a prelude to that reflection, I say that there should be no opposition and government consideration in this committee. There is not and it was very much unanimous amongst the members who put this committee together that it should be a committee that was bipartisan. You will remember, member for Bundamba, that this committee arose out of an examination of the committee structure within the parliament. A committee was formed to look at the committee structure, which some people found somewhat amusing.

Mrs Miller: I am well aware. I do not know need a lecture from you, Deputy Premier.

Mr SEENEY: For the benefit of a whole range of other members who are here, I am going to go through the process, because it was a committee that was put together from senior members of the parliament. The member for Rockhampton, Robbie Schwarten, was on it from your side of politics, as were Judy Spence and Evan Moorhead. Those people were long-serving members of the parliament and certainly no political friends of mine. They were political opponents of mine. It was those people, Lawrence Springborg, Mike Horan and I—all long-serving members of the parliament. We came together to look at the committee structure of the parliament.

One of the things that we decided we needed was a bipartisan committee that represented all of the members equally. Irrespective of what political party or position we held in the parliament, we believed that the CLA represented all of those members equally. We went to great lengths to ensure that nobody had the numbers on the committee, that it was three and three, and any issue had to be either agreed or it went back to the parliament to be decided. Remembering, of course, that I was an opposition member in those discussions, there was an understanding by a group of very senior members of parliament that, for the benefit of the parliament, for the future of the parliament and the benefit of the members who would serve here in the years to come, we should come together and form that committee. That is how the CLA, the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, was born.

As part of the ongoing processes, we considered how we would report to the members. The meeting today or the hearing today is that reporting mechanism. Just like a board of directors comes to an annual meeting once a year so that any shareholder can come and ask questions, we felt that as the board of directors representing all of the members of parliament equally, irrespective of their political affiliations, we should provide an opportunity for them to come and ask questions of the group of members of parliament who are charged with looking after the interests of the members of parliament and the interests and the future of the parliament. The simple answer to your question, member for Bundamba, is that all 89 members—minus those of us sitting here, so that is 82 members of the parliament have equal right to ask questions today and those questions should be asked as members of parliament, not as opposition or government.

Mrs Miller: This is the day that democracy has died in this state.

CHAIR: Order, member for Bundamba!

Mr Sorensen: I note the recent passing of Queensland's first Indigenous member of parliament, Eric Deeral. Can you advise what the parliament has done or is planning to do to honour his service to the Queensland parliament?

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Hervey Bay. I am pleased to be able to put on the record what has been undertaken to date in respect of honouring Mr Eric Deeral, who was the first and only state Indigenous member of parliament. He was also the first ever Australian state Indigenous member of parliament. During the last financial year, a few weeks after coming into my role, on behalf of the parliament, I was fortunate to travel to Hope Vale while Mr Deeral was still alive to honour him on his country and to ask his permission to rename the Indigenous youth parliament after Eric Deeral. Permission was granted. Subsequently, he was able to travel down to the Indigenous youth parliament after which he had been named.

I also took the opportunity, on behalf of the parliament, to initiate a short documentary of the honouring ceremony in Hope Vale, as well as the Indigenous youth parliament so that we have some legacy film for all time as a reminder of what a great leader Mr Eric Deeral was. There are also moves afoot to look at other ways to honour Mr Eric Deeral's memory which are yet to be announced. We are committed to ensuring that this man's outstanding legacy of leadership, servant leadership, not only to Indigenous Queenslanders but to all Queenslanders, is remembered. Certainly we honour and respect his memory and acknowledge that his family has given permission to continue to show that film to ensure that it will be, I believe, a very important way of telling the message of what a great man Mr Eric Deeral was as the member for Cook and continued to be in his service to Queensland after that time. Member for Bundamba.

Mrs Miller: I refer to the previous answer that yourself and the Deputy Premier gave in relation to the Bernays Room. I note that the Deputy Premier said that the report in the *Brisbane Times* was inaccurate or what other people might refer to as a tactical lie. I also note that you said you did not have any—

CHAIR: That is out of order. Member for Bundamba, please put your question.

Mrs Miller: Okay. The question is: in relation to the document that was tabled by the Deputy Premier in relation to the preliminary costings, I ask now what is the actual cost of the renovations to the Bernays Room, including labour costs, any extra desks that have gone into the Bernays Room and any other capital works to improve the functionality of the Bernays Room?

CHAIR: That is a question for the Clerk. I will ask the Clerk to respond.

Mr Laurie: The answer to the question is essentially that these costs are what we estimated to be the actual costs, and there has been no further cost beyond that that I am aware of.

Mrs Miller: Would you be able to confirm that by taking the question on notice?

Mr Laurie: Certainly I am willing to take the question on notice, with the leave of the committee, but I do not think the answer will differ.

Mrs Miller: That is okay. I just want the actual costs.

Mr Laurie: Sure. I will certainly investigate it further, but I do not think it is any more than beyond the document that was tabled.

Mr Crandon: I note in the SDS at page 4, one of the projects for the coming year is to launch an upgraded software system used by Hansard to produce the Record of Proceedings. Can you explain what that project entails?

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk to answer this question.

Mr Laurie: The Parliamentary Reporting Service, colloquially known as Hansard, utilises a unique piece of computer software to produce the Record of Proceedings. The computer software is called the Queensland Hansard Production System or QHAPS. QHAPS is almost 10 years old. The underlying utility that QHAPS uses is Adobe Framework which has been highly customised to provide the required functionality and output. Since its development and commissioning, the QHAPS system has been relatively unchanged, although the operating environment in which it operates has undergone significant changes. The software itself operates on a desktop system such as Windows Workstation, then Windows XP and now Windows 7.

The difficulty is that the Framemaker Version 7 which the system was built in is now not compatible with Windows 7. Essentially, because QHAPS is a critical business application, its ability to operate without significant evolution in an ever-changing network environment is very limited. As regular security updates are received from the Microsoft and Windows server, there is growing concern that QHAPS, and in particular its underlying Framemaker Version 7, will soon be unable to provide a stable solution for the ongoing production of Hansard.

Therefore, in 2011 the Parliamentary Service commenced research to identify a suitable replacement system. Options investigated included scope to purchase and then modify existing systems used in other parliamentary jurisdictions—on the basis of why build something if there is something already in existence—and the development of a new solution based on specific requirements of the Parliamentary Service. The Chief Hansard Reporter has reviewed the Hansard production systems used in most Australasian jurisdictions. There has been extensive discussions within the internal management framework about the use of those. The problem is that each parliamentary jurisdiction within Australia operates a different Hansard production system. Whilst they are basically similar in purpose, the specific business requirements and the network characteristics of each environment do not allow a common, if you like, production system to be adopted in multiple jurisdictions. Therefore, it was decided that the purchase of a custom solution would be very costly, so our preferred option was to build the system from ground up, if you like.

To inform the decision regarding the new solution, a project plan was developed involving the engagement of an external business analyst to confirm the user requirements and develop a technical specifications document for issue to potential suppliers; issue of a market expression EOI process to identify potential market solutions; and following confirmation that potential market solutions existed, issue of a formal market request or RTO process. The RTO process closed on 28 September. The costs incurred to date include \$60,000 for the engagement of the external business analyst. The 2012-13 capital budget provides \$100,000 to fund the project. In addition, \$190,000 set aside in the 2011-12 budget and unspent has been retained to complete the project. I believe that we are going to come in well under budget on this matter.

Mr Sorensen: On page 4 of the SDS, there is mention of a three-year regional education project designed to reach major Queensland regional centres within the parliamentary term. Can you detail what is proposed here?

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk to answer this question, which is in regard to community engagement.

Mr Laurie: Following a strategic planning exercise and the success of the regional outreach activities conducted in Toowoomba in April 2012, which was just after the election, the Parliamentary Education and Communications Secretariat has prepared a three-year plan to undertake regional activities in an additional five regional locations over the full term of the 54th Parliament. The five additional regional areas include Cairns, Townsville, the Gold Coast, Rockhampton and the Sunshine Coast. The plan anticipates each regional outreach visit would involve holding a minimum of six parliamentary education activities in a week, including a youth parliament pre-briefing of teachers, a community awareness activity 'Understanding the parliament and its committees', a parliament education and training conference for the public sector in each area, a stakeholder group activity 'Getting involved with parliamentary committees', a teacher professional development program and a youth parliament program.

Madam Speaker and local members will be invited to participate at the youth parliaments as per the current practice, with between four and 10 electorates involved in each of the regional areas identified. The youth parliament program has been refined to align with the new national curriculum, which focuses on concepts of democracy in year 6. As such, we will now be working with younger students to support the new educational outcomes required. Our experience has shown that primary school calendars have also more space to accommodate extra activities such as youth parliaments than do secondary calendars. The advice to me from education officers is that, given the curriculum of the senior students now, it is very difficult to organise senior level youth parliaments. Conducting each regional outreach within one week will ensure that maximum benefit is achieved while, at the same time, reducing transport and accommodation expenses in the delivery of the product. Revenue from public sector training will defray some of the costs and conservative budget modelling suggests that this program will be achieved within existing budget allocation for the area.

Mrs Miller: This is a question for the Clerk. I refer to page 1 of the SDS, which notes the Parliamentary Service's role in providing electorate office support services. I also note that the electorate offices for new MPs now feature very prominent photos of local members, some in LNP colours. I give Ian Berry as an example. His electorate signage is something like five times the size of what it was for the previous member for Ipswich. What I am asking is whether the Clerk will advise on the guidelines in relation to the use of electorate signage and photos and whether this cost has been incurred by the MPs themselves or whether there has been any reimbursement of the cost of such signage to the parliament.

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk to answer that question.

Mr Laurie: Member for Bundamba, I will deal with the signage.

Mrs Miller: And photographs.

Mr Laurie: Signage is always a relatively interesting issue when new members come in or when electorate offices change. We do have guidelines for signage. The general rule is that we will not pay for any more than what is allotted in the guidelines. So I can confirm with you, if the committee so permits me, to give you a more detailed answer on notice if you like. But my recollection is that in relation to the member that you are talking about there was a certain maximum amount that the parliament contributed and anything over and above that would have to have been paid for by the member. I should also mention that it is not unusual for the colours that the members choose to have on their sign to be the same as the party colours, if you like. That has been something that has been going on for many years.

Mrs Miller: Will you take on notice then please a breakdown of every MP in Queensland, including their signage, the actual cost of the signage and the actual cost of any reimbursement for any extra signage by member?

Mr Laurie: I think I would need leave of the committee to do that.

CHAIR: The Deputy Premier has indicated that he would also like to respond.

Mr SEENEY: I would like to make some comments for the benefit of the members and the people who might take an interest in this. The issue of members' electorate offices and what is displayed there has been the subject of some discussion for quite some years in this parliament amongst members from both sides of the House both before the CLA was formed and since. I think there has been a general understanding that if we try and play politics with our electorate offices we all lose. I have probably had that discussion—

Mrs Miller: This is a question about costs.

CHAIR: Please do not interrupt.

Mr SEENEY: I have had that discussion with two former premiers. When Terry Mackenroth was Deputy Premier, I think that was the first time I had that discussion. I just illustrate that that is a discussion that has been going on for a long time. When the CLA was formed during the last parliament we had, if you like, a more formal look at the whole issue. We discussed a few examples in and around the place. I think the member for Bulimba was an example of a particular electorate office that was used.

Mr NICHOLLS: Owned by the ALP.

Mr SEENEY: Owned by the ALP.

Mr NICHOLLS: In Labor's bright red colours and the sign was about eight-feet high.

Mr SEENEY: The office in Bundaberg was another one. The former member for Everton was another one. There was a whole range of them. What we decided in bipartisan consideration in the CLA—amongst those senior members who, as I indicated before, had come together to act in a bipartisan way on behalf of all MPs—was that we would expect members to be reasonable in the usage of their electorate office in the display of their signs. The issue of corflutes, for example, was the issue that was raised most of all. So long as the corflute was primarily about promoting the MP as the member for whatever seat it was and not about promoting the particular political party then we would accept that that was reasonable. We understood that the display of those corflutes usually had party identifiers on them, but so long as they were not the primary purpose of the sign—so long as the primary purpose of the office was to promote the MP and the job that we all do, irrespective of which party or which political persuasion we come from—then that was a reasonable thing for members to do. I think it is important that all of us understand that we all have the same job of being a local MP and part of that job is making ourselves accessible, visible and building awareness for our constituents. We all do that for the same purpose—to serve our constituents.

CHAIR: I would like to acknowledge that the member asked for a question to be taken on notice. What I would ask the member to do is to put that in writing and submit it to the CLA and then the committee as a whole will be able to make a determination in answering that. So the member is welcome to put a question on notice. For the record, I do not believe there were any questions on notice taken prior to the sitting, but the member is welcome to put it on notice for submission to the committee.

Mr Gulley: The SDS on page 4 refers to the refurbishment of office accommodation on level 6 of the Parliamentary Annexe to deliver expanded parliamentary committee hearing and meeting rooms. Can the CLA detail the costs of the refurbishment and any alternative proposals for addressing the need for dedicated committee rooms?

CHAIR: The Deputy Premier wishes to answer this.

Mr SEENEY: Once again, before the Clerk details the costs that have been incurred on level 6 I think it would be beneficial for all MPs to understand the considerations that were undertaken before we took the decision to make the changes to level 6. Can I begin by suggesting that some of the newer members who did not experience the joys of the level 6 opposition office would fail to understand how substandard that facility was. What I say to the current opposition quite sincerely is that, while there are not too many benefits being in opposition, one of the benefits is that you do not have to deal with that horribly substandard office that everybody acknowledged was a disgrace.

The CLA considered the whole issue of how we provide meeting rooms for the committees that we set up as part of that committee process that I spoke about before. After visiting the New Zealand parliament I think it was unanimously understood that for the committee system to work then all of the committees needed to be able to meet together and all of the committees needed to have their own space in a proper meeting space. So once we had taken the decision to form the committees we then had to turn our attention to accommodating the committees.

There were a number of options looked at, as I am sure the Clerk will well remember. We had gone as far as getting costings on what we considered to be the best of those alternatives. Mr Nicholls was part of that as well. From memory—and the Clerk will correct me, I am sure—we were looking at an expenditure that was estimated to be about \$25 million—

Mr Laurie: \$28 million.

Mr SEENEY:—\$28 million for the best of those identified alternatives. That was about building a couple of extensions on level 7 to provide those committee rooms in the space that is currently occupied by the gym and the swimming pool and the putting green, as we like to call it, on this side. I might ask the Clerk to go through those details. But we were looking at an expenditure of some \$28 million. The alternative that we have achieved on level 6 I think is an admirable alternative. It has produced what I found was to be a quite surprisingly adequate solution. I think the meeting rooms there now are quite impressive and, given the office accommodation that was there previously, I think the builders and the designers have done a remarkable job. But we have also done a remarkable job in avoiding the \$28 million in expenditure that we would have otherwise incurred. I might ask the Clerk to detail those expenses.

Mr Laurie: Certainly. I will try to do this in the shortest fashion possible. In the 2011 CBRC mid-year review funding we basically had approved funding of almost \$0.719 million to upgrade the audio and camera facilities in a number of existing rooms within the parliamentary precinct to provide an interim solution to allow committee meetings and hearings to be conducted pending a comprehensive strategic review of accommodation requirements within the precinct. I should just mention that anything that we did in an interim manner was also designed so that if we did get purpose-built accommodation we could transfer that equipment, so it would not go to waste per se. That upgrade was completed in August 2011.

Subsequent to this, a strategic review of accommodation requirements within the precinct was prepared in consultation with the Department of Public Works, finalised in February 2012. The final report included a preferred option for the construction of a new two-level building adjacent to the Parliamentary Annexe to accommodate committee activities and a subsequent refurbishment of the existing committee office space. That was estimated to cost around \$28 million. Due to the timing of the final report and the state election, the CLA resolved to defer consideration until a new CLA was established. Shortly after the election, the government advised that the proposal was not supported—that is, the \$28 million one—due to the significant estimate cost. It was subsequently approved that the opposition office previously provided with office accommodation on level 6 be relocated to off-site office accommodation as an alternative. We expect the expenditure for the new rooms and the audiovisual to be about \$640,000 all up.

Mrs Miller: Bearing in mind the response that has been given in relation to the renovation on level 6 and the fact that the Deputy Premier seems to be answering nearly every question in relation to the operation of this parliament, it would seem to me, Madam Speaker, that it has been the troika of Newman, Seeney and Nicholls, with Ray Stevens, who has been making the decisions in relation to this House. What I am asking is: Madam Speaker, was it you who made the decision to throw the opposition out of level 6 or was it the Clerk's decision? Whose decision actually was it and what consultation was there with the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the opposition being booted out of the parliamentary precinct?

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, as I have outlined, the Speaker under the current act has no say in regard to allocation of accommodation in the precinct. I will ask the Clerk to answer the question in regard to the allocation of accommodation in the precinct and also to affirm that the Speaker was not involved in respect of the changes regarding the opposition.

Mr Laurie: Section 4B of the Parliamentary Service Act provides that from the polling day until the new CLA is established the functions of the CLA are to be performed by the Clerk in accordance with the policies decided by the CLA before the polling day. Section 5 of that act also provides that the CLA decides the policies about accommodation and services in the precinct. Section 20A provides that the Clerk has control of the parliamentary precinct.

In the days preceding the state election I distributed a document titled *Issues for consideration of party leaders*. It went to both sides of the House, if you like. In that document was a heading called 'Accommodation in the parliamentary precinct', which talked about the above provisions. It made clear in that document that this election was an unusual one in the sense that for the first time the Clerk was in control of accommodation between the polling day and when the new CLA is appointed instead of the Speaker and, I did say, by convention the Leader of the House. What I mean by that is that it was the clear convention, as I understood it from the last CLA, that the Leader of the House would essentially advise the Clerk in relation to accommodation decisions.

In the days immediately following the election there were three accommodation issues to be managed within the precinct: Parliament House office accommodation, annexe office accommodation—and that obviously includes the opposition office that you are talking about—and annexe overnight accommodation. Obviously there are lots of changes that have to occur after an election and this one was a particularly large changeover, with over 51 new members, in addition to all the other matters that happen.

Essentially, in relation to the accommodation issues about the office of the opposition, it was the government's communication to me that they were intending to find off-site accommodation for the office of the opposition. The Ministerial Services Branch funds the opposition and provides support, not the Parliamentary Service, although we did provide accommodation on site as a result of previous governments withdrawing off-site accommodation. But it was basically on the advice from the government that the opposition would be located off site and that instead that space would be utilised for the refurbishment of the committee office, as I detailed in answer to the previous question—so the government, through the Leader of the House, if you like.

Mrs Miller: So it was Ray Stevens?

Mr Laurie: I make the actual decision, but I do so based on advice and convention. The convention was that I rely on the advice of the Leader of the House.

Mr Kaye: The 2011-12 achievements in the SDS list the delivery of a new training and development program for electorate office staff. Can you advise what that entailed?

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk to answer this question.

Mr Laurie: Given that 2011-12 was an election year, it was decided that the available resources for electorate office staff training be directed to induction training for new staff appointed as a consequence of the election. A two-day induction program was developed for new staff which included the following content: the code of conduct and workplace harassment; a tour of the parliamentary complex; manual handling and office ergonomics; dealing with difficult constituents; managing work in

an electorate office; electorate office security and safety; workplace health and safety; electorate office IT systems; members' entitlements; superannuation; salary packaging; an overview of all the parliamentary services provided on the precinct; and general question and answer sessions.

A number of experienced electorate officers participated in the delivery of the training, which proved to be an invaluable resource for the newly appointed staff. Courses were held over a number of dates: 27 and 28 June, 3 and 4 July, 18 and 19 July, 25 and 26 July. A total of 88 staff attended those and the cost was approximately \$55,764. It is proposed to hold one further course before the end 2012 for staff unable to attend the course in June or July and for any new staff who have been employed since July.

Mr Crandon: I am curious as to how the parliament is engaging with its online clients?

CHAIR: I believe the Clerk did partly answer that by giving the number of hits, but I will ask him to more fully outline the online services provided through the parliament.

Mr Laurie: Since about 2001 the parliament has been very much focused on delivering services online where possible. In many respects, in relation to online delivery I have to say that the Queensland Parliamentary Service is probably leading edge.

Queensland was the first Australian jurisdiction to introduce e-petitioning. In the past decade a total of 584 e-petitions have been posted on the parliament's website, with 549 of those being tabled in the assembly. Of those 549 e-petitions, the average number of signatories is 1,451, with a total of 797,099 signatures tabled in the House over the past decade. I think it is fair enough to say that e-petitioning outstrips paper petitioning.

We are also the first jurisdiction that I am aware of to have an online tabled papers database which is a central repository for all electronic documents tabled in the Queensland parliament. This has been available to clients via our website since 2008. Records from 1992 are now captured on the database and 95 per cent of records can be viewed online. So gone are the days where people had to physically front up to the Table Office to view a document or we had to copy documents and send them out. As at 30 June 2012 there were 44,801 records on the database. We are adding to that all the time. We are going back through the records.

Since its inception there have been 1,028 subscribers to the tabled papers alert list. In 2011 alone we had 352 new subscribers. There are currently 659 subscribers. It is estimated that the database page on the website obtained 18,000 hits in the last 12 months. That is some 50 to 60 hits per day.

In terms of broadcasting, the broadcast of parliament project which commenced in 2003 has resulted in our clients being able to view the broadcast of proceedings in the chamber on the parliament's website both in the form of live broadcasts and archived replays via the broadcast on demand facility linked to the online *Hansard*. In 2011-12 there were a total of 42,997 views of the live broadcast and 17,074 views of archived footage.

In relation to committee broadcasts, on 24 August 2011 the first committee hearing was broadcast live via the parliament's internet site. The online committee broadcast system was subsequently upgraded to facilitate the simultaneous broadcasting of up to three live committee hearings from 6 June onwards.

Mrs Miller: I note in the latest annual report that there have been no voluntary early retirements and no retrenchments. I ask the Clerk whether there have been any VERs or retrenchments since this annual report and also whether there has been any discussion in relation to outsourcing IT services and catering as well as cleaning for the parliamentary precinct?

CHAIR: I will ask the Clerk to answer that question. There are a few parts to that question.

Mr Laurie: As you said, there were no redundancies or voluntary early retirements in 2011-12. In 2012-13 so far the Parliamentary Service has processed six voluntary redundancies for parliamentary precinct staff at a cost of about \$388,078, plus a severance payment of \$7,044 for a temporary Community Engagement officer whose temporary appointment finalised earlier than originally proposed. So there certainly have been redundancies in the precinct this year.

Mrs Miller: Are there any more planned for this year?

Mr Laurie: No. I note that you mentioned IT, catering and cleaning. In relation to the cleaners, the member may or may not be aware that the cleaners currently engaged on the parliamentary precinct are actually QBuild workers.

Mrs Miller: I am well aware of that.

Mr Laurie: We were essentially advised that the Department of Housing and Public Works was withdrawing from providing cleaning services. On 31 July the CLA approved a new service delivery model for parliamentary precinct cleaning. In essence, the proposed model will see the total number of cleaners reduced from 16 to 14. The 14 cleaners will comprise seven staff employed directly by the Parliamentary Service and a further seven engaged by the Parliamentary Service through cleaning hire or labour hire companies as required.

Mrs Miller: So privatising the cleaning for Parliament House?

Mr Laurie: What I should mention is that prior to the election and for a very long period we have always had a mixture of permanent QBuild workers and labour hire company people. So the model that we are taking forward very much looks like the model that we had prior to the election. That is there are the same number of permanents versus labour hire company people.

We are reducing the number by two and we are changing the service delivery model so that cleaners will essentially work two shifts rather than the current one shift to provide full coverage across the day. There will still be a larger shift that will commence in the morning, but we will also have an afternoon shift. We find that if we have functions and things of that nature we do not have any cleaning staff in the afternoon at this time.

Mrs Miller: So in total there have been six VERs and two cleaners who have so far lost their jobs in the parliamentary precinct?

Mr Laurie: No, that is not necessarily correct. There have been six voluntary redundancies or similar within the parliamentary precinct. We are reducing the number of cleaning staff, that is correct, because we are engaging them as new staff. They are going to become Parliamentary Service staff rather than QBuild staff.

Mrs Miller: So will their entitlements they had with public works come across to the Parliamentary Service?

Mr Laurie: Those staff who were permanent QBuild employees and have entitlements and who receive positions within the Parliamentary Service will have their entitlements accrue over.

Mrs Miller: So their long service leave and sick leave will all come over to the Parliamentary Service?

Mr Laurie: Anyone who was previously permanently employed by QBuild and who receives a job here will have those entitlements transferred over.

Mrs Miller: So will the two who in effect will be sacked receive their proper entitlements?

Mr Laurie: Anyone who was an employee of QBuild who does not get a position with the Parliamentary Service would be entitled under their various awards to have a redundancy or any payments required under their awards. I am assuming the answer is yes, but it is not my decision to administer those.

Mrs Miller: In relation to IT and catering is there any move to outsource those particular functions given that the government has a view to outsource as much as possible?

Mr Laurie: There is nothing that I am aware of in relation to catering. In relation to IT, there was a review of IT networks undertaken under the last CLA. We are currently still working through the implementation of that. Part of the recommendations of that review was that we essentially change our network model so we use cloud based solutions to enable better access for our clients. There is a possibility under any new model going forward that services that are currently provided here on site may move off site but there have been no decisions made in respect of that.

Mrs Miller: In relation to full-time equivalent staff of the Parliamentary Service there has obviously been a reduction in the number of full-time equivalent permanent staff since the election in March?

Mr Laurie: Yes.

Mrs Miller: Can you tell us what that reduction is or would you like to take that on notice?

Mr Laurie: If you look at the relevant table in the SDS you will see that in 2010-11 we had 465 FTEs in the Parliamentary Service. In 2011-12 that went up to 477. Most of that increase related to the increase in the committee office as a result of the new committee system. In 2012-13 we are down to 471. So the six that I referred to before essentially make up that difference—477 down to 471.

Mrs Miller: If there is a vacancy within the parliamentary precinct will you hold that vacancy over or will you, as in normal public administration practice, fill that vacancy?

Mr Laurie: Generally speaking, the policy that we have in place at the moment is that when a vacancy occurs we generally fill the vacancy. However, it very much depends upon the circumstances at the time. For example, we have a group of FTEs that are essentially floating research officers in the committee office. Every committee has three staff, but we have floating researchers as well. If one of those becomes vacant we might not necessarily fill that position depending on the needs of the committees at the time and the workload. The general position is that when vacancies arise we fill them.

Mr Kaye: I notice that there has been a renewed emphasis on safety and evacuation procedures in the new parliament. Can you outline what has been achieved in this area?

CHAIR: I will take that question and if other staff wish to answer it too, I will leave it to them. When I came in as Speaker I believed it was important that we look at the evacuation procedures, particularly given the number of new members. There are a lot of members who have been here for some time but it had been a considerable time since there had been a full evacuation. I believe the last full evacuation

of the precinct and the old chamber and old House was in about 2003. It was certainly over 10 years ago. I believed it was important given the good work that is done within the precinct by our parliamentary staff, security officers and attendants that it was time to ensure we updated our members and the many people who come into the precinct and work here on these procedures. I have also undertaken with the assistance of the Parliamentary Service briefings with the panel of deputy speakers and committee chairs. I thank the Parliamentary Service for its assistance in this matter.

There is also an independent security review of the precinct which is about to commence. That is really about looking at best practice and ensuring that we do all that is possible to keep the parliamentary precinct safe for members of parliament, staff of the precinct and the public. That is why we undertook those particular emergency procedures.

Time for this estimates has now concluded. I wish to thank the members present who asked questions. I certainly wish to thank the members of the committee and the Parliament Service, headed by the Clerk, Neil Laurie, and the team of staff who are here to ensure the good running of parliamentary services.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 am