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THE PARLIAMENTARY JOINT SESSIONAL COMMITTEE MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART, ON MONDAY 8 DECEMBER 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS OF FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

The committee met at 10.01 a.m.

CHAIR (Ms Webb) - Welcome everyone to today's hearing of the Joint Sessional Committee inquiring into Recommendations made in the Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Tasmanian Government's Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings.

I will introduce you to the members of the committee who are with us today. On screen, we have Jess Greene, Labor member for Bass; Marcus Vermey, Liberal member for Clark; Sarah Lovell, Labor member for Rumney; me, Meg Webb, Independent member for Nelson; Cecily Rosol, Greens member for Bass; and Cassy O'Connor, Greens member for Hobart. We also have Jenny and Allie assisting us with secretariat, and Henry from Hansard.

You will have a chance to introduce your members in a moment, but I'm going to make an opening statement about the potentially sensitive content for today. I recognise that the content of this hearing may be triggering to some members of the committee, members of the community watching online, and others who may come into the room. I encourage anyone impacted by the content matter in this hearing to make contact with support services. These include Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) or Laurel House, the statewide sexual assault support line, which offers 24-hour support from local specialist counsellors, and that's on 1800 697 877, or 1800 MySupport; Lifeline, a 24-hour crisis support on 13 11 14; or A Tasmanian Lifeline from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. every day on 1800 98 44 34; or 13 YARN, a 24-hour crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on 13 92 76; or Relationships Australia, 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Monday to Friday, 1300 364 277.

Thank you, minister, for joining us today and your team. Could you each state your name and the capacity in which you're appearing before the committee and confirm that you've received and read the information for witnesses guide sent to you by the committee secretary?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I have. Starting with my secretary, Ginna Webster; I also have to my left, Peter Whitcombe, who's the Deputy Secretary, Child Safety and Youth Justice Operations; and to the secretary's right, Jenny Burgess, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Performance.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Everyone's received the information for witnesses guide sent by the committee secretary? Great, I am getting nods. Thank you.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege allowing individuals to speak with freedom without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament. I remind you that any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. This hearing is public, which means members of the public and media may be present. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available. This hearing is also being broadcast. Should you wish for some or all of your evidence to be heard in private, you must make that request to the committee and the committee will consider your request.

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The committee is taking sworn evidence, so it's time to do the statutory declarations that are in front of each of you, please.

Ms GINNA MARIA WEBSTER, Ms JENNIFER LOUISE BURGESS, Mr PETER JOHN AUBREY WHITCOMBE, DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. That's all our opening bits and pieces. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement before we move to questions from the committee?

Ms PALMER - Chair, I'd like to thank you and the committee members for the invitation to be here today and I'd also like to thank you, Chair, for your opening comments.

I take this moment to acknowledge and to offer my deepest apologies to all victim/survivors of abuse that occurred in our state government institutions. We regret where we have failed, and we must learn from our failures at all levels.

I acknowledge the victim/survivors listening to these hearings today online and those who may be in the committee room with us. I thank them for joining us. I acknowledge those who have had the courage to speak out and I acknowledge those who could not.

I also acknowledge the original custodians, being the Tasmanian Aboriginal people of the land and the waterways we get to call home. I pay my deepest respects to elders past and present.

I'd also like to acknowledge the work of the Child Safety Reform Implementation Monitor, Robert Benjamin, and his staff. I personally believe our state is beyond fortunate to have this person in this position.

The report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings is a serious account of failures that must and will be fixed. Our government is fully committed to implementing the recommendations and is working hard towards a future where all children and young people in Tasmania have bright lives and positive futures by ensuring they are known, safe, well and learning.

I note that the most recent quarterly update includes the proposed reallocation of certain recommendations between agencies to best utilise our expertise and resources across the State Service. As of 31 October, the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) is the lead agency for 70 of a total of 191 recommendations. The department is also partially responsible for six recommendations officially led by other agencies. For the purposes of today's hearings, I will be speaking to the 79 recommendations the department has historically reported upon, 15 of which are in the Education portfolio and 64 in the portfolio for Children and Youth.

I would like to recognise the enormous work that has been done to implement such crucial reform. Staff in my department and across government are working every day to ensure the rights of children and young people are upheld in all they do, to influence decisions that affect them and to be safe from harm. Our key achievements to date include: approving the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Curriculum for students from Prep to Year 6 with an implementation

plan in development; establishing key teams in the new Office of the Chief Practitioner, commissioning the new Justice information System, YJ+; providing awareness, de-escalation and protection training to all youth workers at AYDC; and launching an internal online hub to make child and youth empowerment resources available to the whole department.

Going forward, our priorities are progressing key enablers of youth justice reform including: both diversionary and early intervention services reform and undertaking a substantive review of the *Youth Justice Act*; establishing a carer register for all types of carers in the out-of-home care setting, progressing detailed design and applications for the new Tasmanian youth detention facility, including Aboriginal co-design; ensuring every child in care has a case manager and individualised care plans; implanting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle; and coordinating a cohesive whole-of-agency and whole-of-government approach to addressing harmful sexual behaviours.

I would also like to briefly address the topic I know may be front of mind, being the changed timeframes of a selection of recommendations. The department and I have been engaging proactively with the Child Safety Reform Implementation Monitor, Robert Benjamin, and through our discussions he has urged us to ensure we don't compromise quality for arbitrary timeframes. The implementation monitor has a critical role in oversight of our efforts and we take his views extremely seriously.

The commission of inquiry report itself acknowledges that the timeframes were provided as guidance. Both the commission and the implementation monitor have been clear that what matters most is delivering high quality, lasting reform that keeps children safe. Two years into the reform, agencies now have a clearer understanding of the scale and the interdependencies involved in delivering the most significant child safety reform program in Tasmania's history, which has informed some necessary adjustments to timeframes.

At a whole-of-government level, of the 191 recommendations 57 have been finalised, 13 will be achieved earlier than the commission recommended, and 94 remain on track for delivery by their original timeframe. There are 27 recommendations whose timeframes have been extended. Of the department's 70 recommendations, there are 19 whose timeframes have been extended, 18 of those belong to the Children and Youth portfolio and one to Education.

Extending the timeframes for these recommendations reflects the momentous work currently underway on major interdependent reform programs, including the delivery of the new Tasmanian youth justice facility, the need to progress consolidated packages of reform related to out-of-home care and crucial amendments to the *Youth Justice Act*. This change also reflects the shift to progressing broad programs of work over individual recommendations, recognising the overlap of projects and the interdependent recommendations, identifying work by its impact instead of its number of holistic and practical.

Moving timeframes further into the future is not a decision that the government takes lightly. We understand the urgency to make change. There are many reasons for a timeframe to move forward, and each recommendation has been considered carefully. In some cases, the timeframe changed because the community told us they needed more time for consultation. In other cases, our attempts to accelerate a process have not been successful, and in some instances the recommendation is impacted by national issues. We remain deeply committed to delivering meaningful, real change, and not treating this as a tick-a-box exercise.

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Our goal is to rebuild the community's trust, keeping children at the centre of all we do and achieve true reform as we work to ensure young people feel safe and are safe in all Tasmanian state government institutions.

In closing, every Tasmanian child is entitled to the best start in life. Every Tasmanian child has an inherent right to feel safe, be well, to be known, and learning. I want all Tasmanians to know this government is listening and is acting. I thank the staff who are working very hard every day to implement these changes. I look forward to assisting the committee with its scrutiny, and I thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, for the opening statement. We will go to Ms Lovell for the first question.

Ms LOVELL - Thanks, minister. I want to go to those extended timeframes and, in particular, talk through some of those recommendations that are being delayed. I preface that by saying I understand why that's required, and certainly would not want anyone to be pushing to get something done by a particular timeframe if that means we're not doing it well.

However, in the quarterly report that's been published through to 31 October 2025, recommendation 6.1 - which we discussed at some length at the last hearing about 18 months ago - I was going to ask you for an update on this anyway. I know there was some significant work being done around reviewing curriculum, and particularly working with South Australia around their mandatory curriculum.

My two questions are one, can you provide us with an update of the progress of that? And two, now that there's a revised timeframe of 2026, do you have anything more specific as to when in 2026 we might see that recommendation implemented?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have certainly taken this very seriously. When it was first presented to me as a new minister that there were going to be some timeframe changes, I thought it was very important to really prosecute that. Whilst I absolutely agree 100 per cent with what Mr Benjamin has said, that we cannot be doing this, and the most important thing is to tick the box and say, 'Yes, we've succeeded because we met the timeframe,' there has to be that genuine flow-on and impact. We must be able to see the impact of this. It was also really concerning to me, though, at that point, the impact that the change in timeframes could have on those individuals who had the courage to step up and played such a pivotal role in the body of work that we have now that will shape the future of our state.

One of the things that I really challenged the department on was: I understand the reasoning behind the timeframes, but what would that impact be? How are we going to actually communicate that to those in the community who could very well feel let down by that? I was very comfortable with the discussions that we had as a department, especially after I then spoke directly with Robert Benjamin about prosecuting every single one that did have a movement in that timeframe. I do believe that we can't come to the end of this process, and have reams of papers and folders with the most wonderful words saying what we want to happen, or what we think should be happening. We actually have to see incredible change on the ground.

With regard to that particular recommendation, 6.01, I'll hand to the secretary.

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Unknown - [inaudible].

Ms PALMER - My apologies.

Ms LOVELL - It has here in the quarterly report. It had an original timeframe 1 July 2026, revised timeframe 2026. This is 6.1, so the mandatory child sexual abuse prevention curriculum. The explanation says that the risk assessment of the two curriculums has been done and that it's in progress. That's still on track for delivery in July 2026?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to the secretary for that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, yes, it is. I think - and [inaudible] the overall government response, but the reporting period has just been generally changed to 2026 in that reporting, but our timeframe of July 2026 has not changed.

Ms LOVELL - Can I make a suggestion that that perhaps be looked at in that quarterly report, because it does look as though there was an original timeframe 1 July 2026, revised timeframe 2026? It looks like there's been a change.

Ms WEBSTER - If I can just clarify, our timeframe for development hasn't changed with July 2026, but obviously we wouldn't implement middle of the school year. We'd start the implementation - does that make sense?

Ms LOVELL - Okay. Let's talk through that, then. If its delivery- the original timeframe for completion was 1 July 2026, are you anticipating that it won't be implemented in the schools until the 2027 school year?

Ms WEBSTER - That's correct.

Ms LOVELL - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, we would start rolling that out, but in terms of implementation into the school, these things are better done at the beginning of the school year.

Ms LOVELL - When you say you'll start rolling it out, you'll start preparing, training?

Ms WEBSTER - In terms of the training, the preparation, yes.

Ms LOVELL - If I can go back to the evidence that we heard in the last hearing, there was work being done then to look at curriculums - in particular, one in South Australia, I understand. Can you give us an update on where you're at with that, and how close that is to being finalised?

Ms PALMER - Certainly. I'll ask the deputy secretary.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. As you may be aware, we've actually been implementing Respectful Relationships in Education curriculum since 2015. With regards to the 'safe and well', which is the element that we've been asked to do within the commission of inquiry recommendations, we have engaged an external consultant to do that work.

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What we're doing now is ensuring that the Respectful Relationships curriculum and the 'Safe and Well' curriculum is aligned through the health and physical education national curriculum. There's a piece of work being done now to ensure that there is alignment and no duplication of effort in that space, and to make sure that it's really clear for teachers so that when they pick it up, they can implement it clearly and without having to think about that piece themselves.

Ms LOVELL - When you say an external consultant has been engaged, they've been engaged to do that work with the comparison between -

Ms BURGESS - The K-6 piece? Yes.

Ms LOVELL - Okay. Are you able to talk through what consultation has taken place as part of that process? Have teachers been consulted with, and other school staff?

Ms PALMER - We'll just seek some advice on that.

CHAIR - We've got a follow-up on that, too.

Ms O'CONNOR - Can I quickly clarify - the 27 recommendations that have had their timeframes extended, is that the complete list of recommendations that the independent monitor put to you? There's 27 extended out - is that body of recommendations exactly what Robert Benjamin advised you should be delayed?

Ms WEBSETER - Through you, minister, no. We were really honest and upfront that these are the recommendations that we won't be able to meet those timeframes for. We then discussed that with Mr Benjamin and had a couple of meetings with him around what that might look like. He was supportive of that - I don't want to speak for him - but also very clear that he was going to be watching to make sure that they didn't continue to blow out.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you for that. Through you, minister. I understood from your opening statement - and maybe I misheard - that the Implementation Monitor raised the issue, but it was actually the department that raised the issue with the Implementation Monitor because you were running behind schedule.

Ms PALMER - No. We went to the Implementation Monitor, but what I was saying is that where I fundamentally agree and we're completely aligned with the Implementation Monitor was don't let this be a tick-a-box exercise, don't let the number-one priority be hitting the timeframe. Let the number-one priority be the impact on children, the outcomes, the genuine changing culture; let that be the priority.

Ms O'CONNOR - But, minister, with respect, it sounds like resourcing has been an issue for the department, which has led to delays in implementing recommendations.

Ms PALMER - I'm really happy to talk through those changes because with some of them, and a good example is the *Youth Justice Act*, in hindsight there are things the commission of inquiry had a date to roll out certain things, but they couldn't be rolled out because the lever was the *Youth Justice Act*. So there were a number of recommendations where we couldn't do it in the order that perhaps the commissioners had said in the report. They're some of the things, but I'm very happy to step through that if you wish.

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Ms O'CONNOR - No, I just wanted to establish that process. I'm fine to move on.

CHAIR - I'm going to come back to Ms Lovell to follow up on that curriculum question earlier.

Ms LOVELL - You've engaged an external consultant. The quarterly report talks about a project team - 'To manage and mitigate this risk, the project team is considering integration of the two curriculums.' How do those two things work together? Is the project team and the consultant one and the same, or is the consultant informing the project? Who is the project team?

Ms BURGESS - The project team would come from our broader curriculum team that sits within our development and support portfolio that is charged with making sure that curriculum can be implemented in schools across all areas of the curriculum.

Ms LOVELL - Specifically this curriculum?

Ms BURGESS - This one would sit within their team.

Ms LOVELL - So there's a curriculum project team that oversees curriculum broadly?

Ms BURGESS - Yes, and this specifically. I have an answer on the consultation. Yes, we have consulted teachers and we created a consultation report. There was a teacher on the project who consulted across sectors as well. In the formulation of that, the curriculum as well, we did consult with stakeholders such as SASS and Laurel House.

Ms LOVELL - So you had one teacher on the team who was responsible for consulting with all teachers across the state?

Ms BURGESS - That person was brought in from outside to do that specific piece of work so they weren't distracted by other broader curriculum work.

Ms LOVELL - A teacher was brought in to work on this specifically?

Ms BURGESS - Yes.

Ms LOVELL - What do you mean by consultation report? What was the process for that?

Ms BURGESS - That would have been all of the feedback from teachers coming together to help land where the curriculum for Safe and Well would be finalised.

Ms LOVELL - Do you know how feedback was sought from teachers?

Ms BURGESS - It would have been verbal and through meetings.

Ms LOVELL - You don't have a record of that?

Ms BURGESS - The team would have a record of the consultation process and that would have been used to do the consultation report.

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Ms LOVELL - Minister, I would be interested in getting some more information about exactly what consultation was done and how teachers' feedback was sought, if that's something you're able to take on notice.

Ms PALMER - We will try to get you that information before the end of the session and if we can't, I'll take it on notice.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. One last question. Do you have the budget or the cost of engaging an external consultant? I don't know if you'd have a final budget on that or what's been expended on that yet?

Ms PALMER - I'm not sure we have that information at the table, but again, that is something we can get for you and we'll attempt to do that in the session.

CHAIR - I have a follow-up on the same area around that prevention curriculum that's been developed, which sounds really positive, but do we have an evaluation plan that will be rolled out alongside its implementation so we'll understand to what extent it's been successful as however we're going to define that and what impact it's had? Can you explain to me the evaluation plan?

Ms BURGESS - As part of any implementation process for curriculum, we would have an evaluation. I don't have the details with me at hand.

CHAIR - Are you able to provide some outline of that plan to us at some point during this morning session?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we'll be able to provide the amount that's been developed.

Ms ROSOL - I want to turn to a couple of things we've talked about together this morning already. We've talked about the delays to the implementation of some of the recommendations and Ms O'Connor earlier mentioned resourcing. I understand resourcing is a significant issue for funding for Child Safety Services and Youth Justice. Looking at the Budget over the next four years, the forward Estimates, the funding across Child Safety Services and Youth Justice decreases, and rounding to the nearest million, this financial year it's \$197 million for Children and Families; next year it's \$192 million, so a decrease of \$5 million; the following year it's \$182 million; and then by 2028-29 it drops to \$178 million, so a significant drop of \$19 million across the four years. It's similar in Youth Justice - it drops \$27 million, a slight uplift to \$31 million, then \$29 million and then \$18 million in four years' time.

I'm trying to fit together commission of inquiry recommendations being implemented. We know significant funding is needed for them, and while you're working to implement the recommendations, the Budget is scheduled to decrease over four years. Can you explain that decrease and the impact it will have on implementation of commission of inquiry recommendations?

Ms PALMER - Absolutely, and I will pass to my secretary and deputy secretaries in those relevant spaces. It's been reported to me that one of the things around the Budget is that it was a little bit initially like designing in the dark. We weren't exactly sure what resources would be needed, what FTEs would be needed, and what some of these complex bodies of work would require. So we were trying to allocate money in the budget around what we thought

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we might need and when we might need it. Some of that has changed as we've moved through this process. I will hand to the secretary to talk in detail around that.

Ms BURGESS - Where we've got to is we now have a greater understanding of the cost of delivery and where we need to put our budget to deliver some of the recommendations. I can talk through some of the issues in Child Safety and Youth Justice. Some of that will be some of the programs that finish. There was a \$15 million allocation to out-of-home care; I think it was \$9 million this year and then \$6 million next year for out-of-home care, and then there was baseline funding for out-of-home care as well. There's some funding for two years around the transition to independence and then some funding for fostering kinship carers.

Some of the work that needs to inform future funding, particularly in Child Safety, is being undertaken by the Uplifting Care project. So there is an opportunity for us to go back to government and say, 'This is what we need to implement'. There's a lot more flexibility now for me as secretary to be able to move resources and place them into the areas we need to, to get the recommendations done. Some of that explanation is those short-term funding allocations that drop off. That doesn't mean to say that we wouldn't go back and ask for additional funding.

Ms O'CONNOR - There is no additional funding anywhere, with respect. It's all going to be poured into Macquarie Point.

Ms BURGESS - That's probably not a matter for me. As well as the Youth Justice investment, there are also some programs that will be ramped up. Then as we're looking at making improvements in diversion and bail support, those things, we will need to go back and say, 'This is what we need to deliver these services'. I was around when we developed that initial budget for the commission of inquiry, but in a different portfolio, and it was very much about making sure we did those first lot of recommendations and implemented them with integrity. We're now onto the second and third lot of recommendations to implement with integrity and with some sustainability.

The clear message is the government has committed to implementing the recommendations. Our job is to work through and be very clear about those recommendations and what the long-term sustainability of the child safety and youth justice sector is.

Mr Whitcombe, might have some additional -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I guess I wanted to provide a little bit of context and some assurance, particularly around the recommendation of every child having an allocated key worker. We know we are not going to make that timeline of mid-2026, but we also know that, over the course of the last year, we've seen close to 200 children more than we were allocated. In terms of the approach taken to recruitment and retention and bringing staff into our service, we've seen that grow by 36 FTE and we have gone as hard and as fast with our recruitment to grow our workforce as we possibly can.

When we think about what it will take to get to a point where all children have an allocated key worker, where our key workers have appropriate caseloads, we know that if we keep going as hard as we are, we will get there in, we think, 2027. We've just had to be upfront and realistic about what it takes to grow and retain the workforce. There's no holding back right now on our continuing recruitment for our child safety workforce.

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Ms ROSOL - Thank you for that. I guess it's trying to fit all that together; that you're recruiting more people, you need to keep recruiting more people, and it needs to be sustainable, but the figures here show that there's a decrease in funding and how that will play out.

In terms of the case manager and the key worker for children, can I get some figures maybe on how many children are currently in out-of-home care and how many currently don't have an allocated case manager? If that could be a statewide figure and then by region, please.

Ms PALMER - Yes, we can get that information for you. We don't have it at the table, but we'll get that information for you.

Ms ROSOL - There is another question that goes with that. How many case management teams are currently operating, how many staff are on each team, and how many children are allocated to teams? How many in out-of-home care, how many don't have an allocated case manager child safety officer, how many case management teams are operating, how many staff in each team and how many children allocated to case management teams?

CHAIR - You've repeated that twice and there's a lot of people in the room who are hopefully taking notes for the minister to be able to bring back -

Ms PALMER - She's taking her own notes as well because she can take it off.

CHAIR - Excellent, thanks.

Ms O'CONNOR - Just quickly. Going back to my earlier line of questioning. I'm trying to understand the process that led to these cuts across the forward Estimates. Was that, noting what the secretary said about it being a recalibration of understanding what the costs would be of delivering on the recommendations. Were these funding adjustments or cuts based on the advice of the department? Is there an efficiency dividend within those reductions across the forward Estimates? Has there been any request, for example, from Treasury or the Treasurer, that there be cuts to the budget allocated for implementation of the commission of inquiry recommendations?

Ms PALMER - There are a number of questions in your question. I will try to work through that. The government committed \$424.5 million in the 2024-25 Budget and forward Estimates for the ongoing implementation of these reforms. That included \$92 million in the 2025-26 Budget. This builds on funding of \$55.1 million provided in the 2023-24 prior to the acceptance of the commission of inquiry report.

In addition, this budget allocates \$105.3 million over the forward Estimates to deliver the new Tasmanian youth justice facility and now that the site master plan and development application are completed. This is in addition to the \$50 million already allocated for the delivery of the new justice facility in previous budgets. The total budget now for the youth justice facility sits at \$156 million over the forward Estimates.

An additional \$30.8 million to deliver a new human resources information system across government to link up employer information - this is a critical enabler to delivering the recommendations of the commission of inquiry and Woolcott reviews.

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There's an additional \$2.9 million for the State Archives to digitise and make accessible files to victim/survivors, and a further \$26 million across agencies for various recommendations for delivery until 2028-29.

We did have to reprofile some funding over the forward Estimates as the commission of inquiry implementation evolved and, as the secretary has said, if we need to go back to government, we will go back to government. I think the secretary had something to add to that.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, minister. If I could just address you to the question. I'm trying to understand the genesis of decisions that have been made to cut the allocated funding for implementing the commission of inquiry recommendations.

Just going back to what the secretary said before about a budget being set early, and then, that wasn't quite the right budget. Align that with the 27 recommendations which have been pushed out and there seems to be a very clear link between under-resourcing and cuts and delays to the implementation of recommendation. It seems impossible to ignore that link.

What I'm trying to understand here is: did the department come to you and say, 'We don't need this extra money,' which would be an amazing thing for a department to do, or was it an efficiency dividend, or did the Treasurer ask you to find some savings so you can push out the funding out past the forwards because, in part, there's \$609 million in this year's Budget for the stadium?

Ms PALMER - I will go to the detail of that with the secretary. What I will say is that there have been some recommendations where we've been able to move the timeframes up. There are some recommendations where, out of necessity, we have had to push them back. There's a variety of reasons for that and I'm very happy to step through them. We have that information at the table. As I say, there were some examples where the way the recommendations were initially put, the timeframes that were initially put simply cannot happen that way because we need legislation to be put in place to actually enact some of those.

We've gone through every recommendation in a genuine way and said, 'How do we deliver these in a genuine manner?' Yes, we may not meet some of those timeframes, but, that is actually, really - it's a positive thing when we know it will come to achieving genuine outcome. We then took those timeframe changes to Robert Benjamin and said, 'Work through this with us, are we on track here?' The advice that's been given to me and through direct conversations I've had with him, he was very comfortable with the time changes. He felt that they were - it was a very genuine lever to pull, to change those timeframes to ensure that we are getting the best outcomes and being true to the spirit and to the principle of the recommendations from the commission of inquiry. I will pass -

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you. I just haven't had an answer to that question yet about this carve-out of funds from the agency budget. I'm trying to understand how it happened. Just going by what you said earlier, there have been some delays to reforms to the *Youth Justice Act*, for example. We've had a youth justice blueprint here in this state for many years that there have been delays on implementation of. Yet, the government that you are part of could pull together a 157-page order on the stadium in a couple of months. We're being told that it's not been possible to deliver the amendments to the *Youth Justice Act*, and that's partly why there are these delays. It's just that what you say and the reality don't seem to line up.

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Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, could we give some examples?

CHAIR - If it's in an effort to answer the question, yes.

Ms PALMER - It is in effort, because some of these are - I think if we have the opportunity to actually put some examples on the table, you would see the the real, genuine need for some of these timeframes to move. Are you happy to -

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Just a couple of things. The key factor for us here is really the sustainability of the implementation and the complexity of those recommendations, including making sure that we've got the right workforce in the right place.

Mr Whitcombe will talk to this - there's a lot of rebuilding or building that we're doing in the child safety and youth justice area to make sure that the workforce is ready for the significant change that is being undertaken. If we use the *Youth Justice Act* as an example, many of the recommendations in terms of that timing, it seems to us that it was very clear that we needed to do a whole of *Youth Justice Act* piece of reform. There is a huge number of stakeholders that are interested in this reform, so the consultation piece and the discussion paper will include that holistic *Youth Justice Act* reform.

Many of the recommendations that we needed implemented for the building of the youth justice facility were required to be brought forward. We've actually brought forward a lot of those recommendations as well to do a holistic piece. To give you an example, one of the recommendations was around the principles of the *Youth Justice Act*, and that was towards the end of the process. There's much more sense that that's done at the beginning, because that guides the entire redevelopment of the *Youth Justice Act*. What we've done is make one piece of very complex reform, brought forward some and pushed out another. I think we've been really open and upfront about the complexity of the reform.

The other thing that I would say is that many of the recommendations talk to the building of the youth justice facility. There is an additional \$100 million in the Budget for that facility build, and coming out soon we will have a model of care for that facility.

With all of these things, we are trying to do them in a really appropriate sequence, and we also have to build the capacity of the sector. There is a lot of work to do in that area. For us, we have really tried to be upfront and honest about when we can make those changes and prioritising frontline service delivery for children and young people.

The other thing that I would say in terms of budget efficiencies, as an agency, we have asked ourselves, of course we have budget efficiencies and we have to work within those, but we have tried really hard, and we ask ourselves the question when we're doing any recruitment, what is the impact for children and young people? That is the first question that we ask ourselves. I think we are approaching this from: we are committed to implementing the recommendations, we are committed to implementing them with integrity, and we want to minimise the impact on children and young people.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you. That was a very sincere and heartfelt answer, and it's good to hear. I still haven't had an answer to the question, but I'm happy to move back to Ms Rosol, Chair, if that's where we are.

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CHAIR - That's fine. Did you want to add something else to that answer anyway, just to put something on the record about it?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I would like to. I think it would be really good to succinctly and quickly give some examples to help Ms O'Connor.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, and I will be quick. I want to provide assurance around the *Youth Justice Act* that Ms Webster was just talking about. In terms of those three areas that we are delaying, they centre around use of force, they centre around isolation, and they centre around searches. We have done policy and practice work to make the practice and quality and oversight of that practice consistent with the intent of the commission of inquiry recommendations. In the here and now, what children and young people experience is consistent with the commission of inquiry recommendations. We know that those changes then need to be made in law, and we will progress that through the act review.

One further point: the commission of inquiry really calls for quite fundamental change in the way that our frontline workforce is organised. It talks about a relational approach to practice. The way that we are organised at the moment is more around specialties and is more around moving families through a system, as opposed to holding that relationship and working with them in the long term. We have needed to establish things like the Office of the Chief Practitioner, which is about leading practice, about learning, about growth, and about different ways of practising, and have that in place prior to making those changes within our workforce.

If we want to work differently across the system and sector, we've needed to establish a commissioning and partnerships team, which didn't exist previously, but we've needed to grow that function, grow that muscle, in order to be able to work in different ways.

I'm just trying to provide examples of the foundations that need to be built on which you then grow a well-functioning child safety and youth justice service.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you for that information. Just following on from that - are you saying that if you had another \$20 million available to you that you wouldn't be able to do it faster?

Ms PALMER - One of the examples given to me was that even if you had double the money, there are some things that just can't be done faster if they're to be done genuinely - building capacity, some of the things that the deputy secretary has just gone to.

Ms ROSOL - What about things like staffing, though? The deputy secretary referred to 35 more staff. I know in your annual report you say there are 17 additional child safety officers. If there was more money available to you now, would you be employing more child safety officers and more staff now?

Ms O'CONNOR - Good question.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. As I stated earlier, we have been relentless in our approach to growing our child safety officer workforce. We've gone as hard and as fast as we possibly can, and we've seen really significant growth. We expect to continue to see that growth. There's been no hold put on our frontline child safety officer positions.

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Ms ROSOL - Can I ask about vacancies in child safety? You've talked about -

Ms LOVELL - Can I just have one about funding, if that's all right?

Ms ROSOL - Yes.

Ms LOVELL - Is there funding that's quarantined for implementation of these recommendations, or is it just in the broader department budget now?

Ms WEBSTER - There is commission of inquiry funding that we have as a global figure within the organisation, but also I can move staff and reprioritise to add to that funding, if I need to.

Ms LOVELL - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - Peter might have the answer to that.

Ms ROSOL - Just a question around vacancies, because you've talked about creating more positions but, when we've asked previously, there have been significant vacancies. What are the vacancies currently in child safety services, and particularly in child safety officer positions - and by region, if you could, please?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'll start with the north, in terms of child safety officers. We currently have budgeted FTE of 25. Currently, we have occupied FTE of 30.8, so that's 5.8 over our budgeted. In the north-west, we currently have a budgeted FTE figure of 23.5, and occupied FTE of 28.1. For child safety officers in the south, we currently have budgeted FTE of 56.4, and occupied FTE of 54.9.

Ms ROSOL - In order for every child to have their own case manager, what FTE would you need for that? What are you aiming for?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I will answer honestly. We've been doing the figures in this space, and it appears to be around the 40 FTE mark that we would need beyond what we currently have. We're in the process of testing and refining those figures in terms of the full breadth of the commission of inquiry recommendations and what it would take, so we're doing further work at the moment.

Ms ROSOL - Forty across the state on top of what you have, based on your current calculations around that, if heard that correctly?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct.

CHAIR - It's perhaps not an unrelated area, but I wanted to get some figures related to self-selected placements in children who are under care and protection orders. Firstly, it would be good to clarify the department's definition of a self-selected placement. I'm keen to understand how many children currently under care and protection orders are classed as being in self-selected placements, and have that breakdown by region and age. I realise that if the numbers are too few, for example, in the younger cohorts, that might be something you're not able to give me with quite as much granularity as that.

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I'm also interested to know how that has been tracking over recent years in terms of the numbers and as a proportion of our total number of children under Care and Protection Orders.

The other thing I'm keen to know about in relation to self-selected placements is how those placements are reflected in the child protection data that's provided to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to then go through into RoGS data, I presume, at a national level. How do we represent those?

Ms PALMER - We will be able to get that information to you and attempt to bring that to the table.

CHAIR - Thank you. Something that's not data-related but still on the same topic in terms of self-selected placements, I'm interested in understanding the process for arriving at a determination that a placement is now a self-selected placement for that young person. Are there particular timescales related to that in terms of identifying the situation of the young person or child in that way? Who is responsible for making the determination that that's now a self-selected placement and what are the criteria?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'm not going to answer your question completely but I'll answer it with the knowledge I have. In terms of that reference of being self-selected, it's something I've talked to my leadership group about not using -

CHAIR - It's an incredibly offensive term.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, language - and the reason for that sits around the responsibilities we have to engage, to have relationship and for there to be a safe place where that young person feels as though they connect and belong and ultimately are part of a family.

Notwithstanding that, it is true and fair to say that young people will and do make their own decisions about where they want to be and who they want to be living with, and it's a real balance in our practice. Sometimes the decisions they make, as you know, come with a whole lot of inherent risk, and we could do all sorts of things to try to move them into another place and they would simply go back. We have a role and responsibility around building safety and safety plans around where they're at. Equally, it's not acceptable not to have an alternative appropriate long-term care option for young people and we cannot just be accepting of those situations that are risky for young people.

I know that the team in the background will be doing some work to get the data, the numbers around how many situations we might sort of see as 'self-selecting', but I hope that that information is helpful.

CHAIR - You might be able to go to some of the more qualitative things I've just asked on top of the data, and that's around who's responsible for determining that there's whatever we're going to call it, that kind of placement? That care and protection order on that child is now going to be labelled as a self-selected placement or a whatever we might want to call it placement that is less offensive than that. Who's responsible and what are the criteria for it? It goes back to that earlier question when I asked what's the definition of that for you?

Mr WHITCOMBE - We can pull the policy out and perhaps bring that to the table in relation to that.

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CHAIR - Okay, thank you. I know Jess Greene has some questions.

Mrs GREENE - I do, thank you. Following on from the questions from Ms Rosol regarding vacancies, you've already outlined that you're over establishment in those regions. Do those figures you've quoted include staff on workers compensation or long-term sick leave?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Mrs GREENE - Given that, would you be able to give us updated FTE numbers of how many staff are actually on the ground?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, I can. I'll go through that with you now piece by piece. Of the figures in the north, which I started off, we have budgeted FTE of 25, occupied FTE of 30.8. We also have 4 FTE in that region on workers comp. For the north-west, 23.5 budgeted FTE, 28.1 occupied FTE, and we've got 6.7 FTE on workers comp. For the south, budgeted FTE of 56.4, occupied FTE of 54.9, and on workers comp we've got 4 FTE.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. I think that provides a bit more of an accurate picture for us on the committee of resourcing as it stands, and hopefully you can provide those figures to us more regularly.

I'd also like to ask about recommendation 9.16 from the quarterly report. The summary there is to 'ensure all children in care have a case manager, set maximum caseload for child safety officers, and to regularly publish related data.'. It's already been noted today that not every child has a case manager. Can you provide an update on the other two parts of that recommendation and provide some detail on the updated timeline, given that was meant to be completed by 1 July next year and now it's looking like 2027?

I suggest we start with the maximum caseload for child safety officers. I'm keen to understand a little more about that timeline.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Mrs Greene. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'm taking that the question is about caseload numbers?

Mrs GREENE - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - From 2015, there is an agreement, or a letter as a result of the TIC determination, which sets caseloads at particular levels, and it's dependent on the role of the child safety officer. I'll speak to what I can off the top of my head, and I'm happy to bring that particular letter and table that.

For children who are in care, the maximum caseload level outlined at that point was 15, and that would be a trigger point for a conversation. It's 15 children, as opposed to 15 families. For staff and the response team, the number of six families was a trigger point for conversations around maximum caseload and what support staff would need.

As to the work we are currently undertaking to determine safe and appropriate caseload levels, we are exploring evidence from around the world in terms of what does good look like for child safety and youth justice workforces, and we're feeding that into the work and the

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modelling we're doing around what FTE we require to be able to deliver on a good-quality child safety system.

Mrs GREENE - You've referred to the 2015 TIC determination around caseload caps. I note that last year in the Tasmanian Industrial Commission at the start of 2024, there was also a commitment given through bargaining that there would be updated caseload numbers. Can you outline what has occurred during negotiations, and how far away a new system would be? I guess it really comes down to recruitment and retention of staff. If staff have unreasonable caseloads, that means we're letting young people down. Staff have already been waiting almost two years for this and I'm not too sure staff feel like they were already supported by that 2015 decision.

Mr WHITCOMBE - There have been different data points that I've looked at in terms of average caseload numbers across our workforce right now, and they sort of oscillate between 11, 12 and 13 children per worker.

In terms of your question about the negotiation of a new agreement, we are undertaking work within our agency, and in conjunction with unions, in the first half of next year - but we've started that work. In terms of the development of a single spine agreement for our workforce, at the moment we have a workforce that has a range of different awards.

It's problematic in terms of terms and conditions and what people can expect, and there are overlapping parts of it. That's a really significant piece of work, and we see that as a really strong platform for making sure our workforce has the right tools, skills, support, workloads in place, in terms of the future workforce. That's work to be undertaken in 2026.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. To go back to my earlier point, though, workers in 2024 were already given a commitment that this allocation would be resolved in terms of their workload, and now it's been two years. Can we have an updated timeline on how long this is going to take, in terms of their workload management tools?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, the role of our practice leaders and our practice managers is the critical role in making sure we're not overloading our frontline staff with high levels of caseloads. The executive director and I recently did a range of forums with staff. Certainly, workload and case load were part of what was asked within those forums, and it was clear that there were some situations across our service where that number of 15 as a cap we were well over that with some of our staff.

I don't see that as sustainable or acceptable, and in those situations, I know our practice leaders and our practice managers are working constructively, as per the TIC agreement, to see those numbers reduced. As I said earlier as well, if we were to average out those case load numbers across our service, on average, we are not sitting above that threshold in terms of a high workload.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. One final question on this. For workers who are currently on long-term sick leave or workers' compensation, do they have cases allocated to them, or are their cases reallocated? How are they being managed?

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Mr WHITCOMBE - No, those who are on workers' compensation don't have caseloads allocated. They are picked up by other members of our team. At times - and again, we don't want this to be the case - they've been picked up by practice leaders.

Mrs GREENE - Those additional cases that have been allocated to them are sitting above their 11, 12 or 15 cases that we currently have?

Mr WHITCOMBE - No, that's not correct. They would be counted as caseloads that they're carrying.

Mrs GREENE - Sure. Thank you.

CHAIR - Ms Rosol, you have more on this?

Ms ROSOL - Slightly different, but staying with child safety services - I have a question about how many children on care and protection orders have been outsourced or referred to external providers. Then I'd like to come to that recommendation that's been delayed, but yes, how many children in out-of-home care are without -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I can respond to it in an approximate way; it does sort of change every week. In terms of children and young people on care orders who are with external organisations like Baptcare, Glenhaven, Mission, Life Without Barriers, and Key Assets, in the foster care space I understand there to be about 45 per cent of children cared for through those NGOs. If you add the number of children who are in salaried care packages - and that number sits around 100 - our total number of children who are cared for through NGOs is over 50 per cent.

Ms ROSOL - Can I just clarify - the salaried care packages are those where the carers are paid kind of a professional wage?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct, yes.

CHAIR - Just to follow up, where there might be a child placed in particular accommodation, say, a unit, and then there are paid staff attending to that child in that environment, over a 24-hour period, on a rostered basis?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct.

Ms ROSOL - In relation to that, the provision of out-of-home care by the non-government sector - recommendation 9.2 - there seems to have been a change in the language around that. In the explanation for the two-year delay, it says:

By the end of 2026, DECYP will determine the proportion of care provision to be delivered by the non-government sector.

That is a shift from all out-of-home care being in the non-government sector to a proportion of it being determined. Can you just explain, or help us understand, that shift in language, and where you're sitting with this recommendation now?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Thank you.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. This is an emerging conversation at the moment. What it is referencing is, the recommendation was clear: all forms of out-of-home care, 100 per cent, would be delivered through non-government organisations.

In terms of some of the conversation and not any of the decisions - and I have to be really clear about that - no policy decisions have been made to shift away from that recommendation. However, we have been having conversations to say that in our care system, we know - and we see in other jurisdictions across the world - there are moments where all else has failed and somebody needs to be the backstop for children.

In terms of the government being that carer of last resort, there is some thinking about what proportion of care might need to be held as capacity for children who present with real challenges in terms of care, and how we can make sure that they're never left in a situation where there is no option. So, that's the conversation.

In terms of any shift away from that recommendation, we would need to consult, and we would need to think through really carefully what that means for those people who gave evidence within the commission of inquiry. So, I want to be very careful about the way that we talk about any shift.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

CHAIR - We will move on to a different area, if that's okay. It's one that we've discussed in recent times, in other circumstances, minister. It's about the funding provided to JCP Youth and the BEAST Program. Obviously, that funding is part of the focus into a diversionary space and an early intervention space - that's what I've understood it to be as part of the effort towards. I'm interested to know about that program, what's funded under the contract, and whether it includes circumstances where a single staff/worker from the program would stay with a child overnight in a hotel?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that question. For the last part of it, I might pass to the deputy secretary.

We have certainly upheld our continued commitment to support diversionary programs for at-risk young people, which is in alignment with commission of inquiry recommendation 13, with the JCP Youth Funding Agreement signed on 3 February 2025.

JCP's innovative BEAST program delivers statewide high-impact interventions for children and young people, which is, of course, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The diversionary programs are targeted at young males aged 11 to 17 years who are demonstrating at-risk behaviours that may lead to or have already contributed to contact with the youth justice system.

One of the things that the department's worked really hard on with JCP is around the governance, and some of the work that the department's really able to partner with JCP on to ensure that there is accountability and that there is really strong governance. I know there have been a number of questions about JCP that we've certainly attempted to answer in the Legislative Council. With regard to the overnight stay, I will check with my secretary.

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CHAIR - I'm particularly interested to know whether the funding for the program and the contract cover circumstances under which a single worker would stay overnight in a hotel with a child. If so, what aspects of the program model that activity would be related to and what oversight and reporting would be expected on that activity?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, a quick response to situations of a young person being in a hotel with carers. I'm not aware of any situations that fit that description.

CHAIR - That's never been brought to your attention?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Not to my attention.

CHAIR - It's been brought to my attention that there are regular instances in which a JCP Youth worker might be overnight in a hotel with a young person. I'm wondering if that's part of the funding and the contract that's covered by the government's funding of that organisation?

Ms PALMER - I'm certainly not aware of that. If you have examples of that, it would be good if you actually brought them to us.

CHAIR - For a start, you could look at social media. What about interstate trips with young people under that program? Does the government funding and contract cover interstate trips for young people with JCP Youth workers for activities interstate, potentially with other third-party organisations or programs in other states?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Not as part of our funding and contracting arrangement with JCP Youth. I would not want something to be conflated whereby it might be part of a child's care plan to travel interstate to meet with their wider family or some other matters whereby those children who are involved with JCP may be doing that. I don't know of any situations -

CHAIR - Would they be doing that with a JCP Youth worker and engaging in other activities interstate with that worker while on a trip to meet with family members?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'm not aware of any of those situations.

CHAIR - Minister, you're not aware of any situations in which a child on a care and protection order has been either taken for overnight stays at hotels within the state, or on interstate for trips with a JCP worker?

Ms PALMER - I would have to seek that information from JCP. To the very best of my knowledge, I'm not aware of that, but I'm very happy to look at the details about that.

CHAIR - Is that a circumstance under which it could be contemplated - under the contract that we have with JCP Youth as a state and the funding provided, are those sorts of activities something that could be contemplated under that funding? If so, what would need to be in place for those activities in terms of risk assessment and oversight and reporting for those activities to occur?

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Ms PALMER - You've raised some issues with that question that I will need to explore. What I can say is that JCP is committed to providing that really safe and nurturing environment for children in all aspects of the program that they deliver.

As a department and as a minister, we expect there to be absolute accountability in that area. We see the strengthening of that with things like the fact that JCP Youth is a relevant entity under the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act*, so they are required to comply with the act to be a child safe organisation. Of course, this act is overseen by the independent regulator. JCP Youth operates under child protection policies, including a child safe code of conduct aligned with the child and youth safe organisations framework to safeguard young people and to manage any concerns about child abuse.

Obviously, all their volunteers and employees have to have a working with vulnerable people card and are over the age of 18. Their staff also complete the Australian Childhood Foundation's safeguarding children training, and Introduction to Trauma and Trauma Informed Practice workshops, both delivered by Lifeline, and DECYP's safeguarding training for external providers, along with youth and mental health for first aid.

JCP Youth also has a formal complaints process, enabling concerns including those around child abuse to be raised both internally and with independent regulators as appropriate. There are a lot of safeguards that have been put in place and a structure that has been put in place around JCP.

With the specifics of what you're raising here, I would need to take a further look at that.

CHAIR - It's interesting that you have to put safeguards in place when funding is allocated via election commitment rather than via an open tender process where fully qualified organisations that we could have full confidence in the governance of could put forward their case for that funding. Unfortunately, in this case they weren't given the chance. Let's be clear about that.

Ms PALMER - Although, in fairness, Chair, what's been reported to me is that there isn't another service in Tasmania offering what JCP does.

CHAIR - There absolutely are. If you had put this out to tender, there are other services that would have and could have tendered for it, likely successfully, because they're doing very similar work. Funding to the sector in the past has not allowed those programs to go out, for example, overnight and pick children up; it wasn't allowed under funding. Let's be clear, there are plenty of very good evidence-based programs in this state that could have tendered for this money if it had been put out to tender.

My question, though, is back to this situation. You've mentioned the independent regulator, and you've mentioned safeguarding oversight. Have any reportable conduct reports been made relating to instances where a JCP worker has stayed overnight in a hotel with a child to your knowledge?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Can I clarify to an earlier question, Ms Webb, where you're asking about a child on a care and protection order. Obviously, if a child is on a - not all children in JCP Youth are on a care and protection order. If there was a child on a care and protection order, the requirement is the secretary is the guardian, so there are additional

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things that would have to happen no matter where that child was, in terms of which organisation, in terms of giving permission for those sorts of things that you're talking about.

CHAIR - That's why I was making a distinction. There are two things I'm interested in hearing about. One is the extent to which the department and the minister are aware of whether the government contract and funding for JCP Youth, broadly for the program, would allow for overnight stays in a hotel with a child and a single worker, or interstate trips, similarly.

Additionally, I'm interested in whether any children under care and protection orders have been in that circumstance and what oversight, risk assessment and reporting would be required for that to happen.

Ms O'CONNOR - Also the answer to your question, about whether anyone - there's been a reportable conduct notification about JCP?

CHAIR - That applies to either children on care protection orders or otherwise.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. There are no current outstanding reportable conduct matters that I'm aware of.

Ms O'CONNOR - Are there historical ones?

CHAIR - The question was, to phrase the question carefully: are you aware of any reportable conduct reports that have been made relating to instances where a JCP worker has stayed overnight in a hotel with a child or gone on an interstate trip with a child?

Ms PALMER - Chair, we're wondering if we could go in camera for this?

CHAIR - The committee will need to consider that request. I'm going to have to ask for the room to be cleared and for the committee to consider that request. While that happens, we're going to stop the broadcast and then we'll resume the broadcast at whatever point in time later that we get through this discussion and this matter.

First of all, the committee has to consider the request. We'll stop the broadcast. Everybody will need to leave the room.

The committee suspended from 11.21 a.m. to 11.24 a.m.

CHAIR - The committee has considered the request to go in camera to take evidence and is happy to do that for a period of time.

We are now going to stop the broadcast and take that in camera evidence and then resume the broadcast afterwards.

The committee suspended at 11.24 a.m.

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The committee resumed at 11.43 a.m.

CHAIR - The broadcast has resumed and we are no longer in camera.

We'll go back to taking regular evidence and revisit some of the questions related to whether the contract and government funding of the JCP program would provide for activities such as overnight stays in hotels with children in the program, or on interstate trips with children in the program and, if so, what would be required around that activity in terms of oversight, reporting and accountability beyond the simple consent of a guardian?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair, I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - I will read some of the things that the program offers, then answer the second part of your question, and then pass to the deputy secretary. The program offers outdoor recreation programs and development camps; community-based support; outreach available seven days a week, 24 hours a day; emergency and respite accommodation; and programming that supports prosocial behaviour.

We've talked about permission from the young person's guardian, but in terms of the other things that would be expected, it would be an expectation that the department is liaised with, for want of a better word, if there was any activity that required something outside the norm for those young people. If that person was on a care and protection order it would mean obviously permission from the secretary if something was outside of the regular process. Also there would be - I'm just trying to find the words in the service level agreement, but I might -

CHAIR - Beyond simple consent from the appropriate guardian, what else would need to be documented, reported, what risk assessment would need to be documented, and how would that look?

Ms WEBSTER - I might pass to Mr Whitcombe to explain what happens from an operational perspective.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Every child and young person is unique and different and, depending on their involvement with the Child Safety Service, has their own set of behaviours and relationships they might have with various professionals or with families. All those things are unique and different in every single situation. Certainly in my experience and to my knowledge, the vast majority of situations that would involve children travelling interstate would be to do with maintenance and strengthening of family connections and relationships. That would be the typical purpose. In terms of a plan for that, again, that's unique to every child and situation.

CHAIR - So a plan would be required? I'm trying to find out what documentation, what risk assessment, what reporting and what oversight would be required. I'm not asking you to tell me about every single plan and what's in it. I'm looking for the mechanics of it.

Mr WHITCOMBE - We have a travel policy that would apply to children and young people travelling interstate. Would it be helpful if we tabled that? That would show what we would expect and have the guidance.

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CHAIR - To clarify, would that travel policy apply not just to children on care and protection orders who might be involved in these programs, but because it's a government-funded program and the clients of that program who are not on care and protection orders might be also undertaking those activities, would the travel policy apply to those clients of the program as well?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Not in the same way, no.

CHAIR - I would like to understand what would be different about the oversight, the reporting, the risk assessment for children who aren't on care and protection orders as well as part of that program.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I'd like to take that question on notice so that we're able to provide you with what that travel policy is and how it relates to children in care and protection where the secretary is the guardian, and then how it applies to children where it's the parents or carers or next of kin who would be that, so we would be able to give you a full example of both of those scenarios.

Ms WEBSTER - There is a requirement in the funding agreement for JCP Youth to maintain regular contact with community youth justice representatives and to advise on scheduled plans or activities relating to JCP Youth participants that may impact any services provided to young persons. There is a requirement there.

Ms O'CONNOR - Can I just check on something? That indicates that from the department's point of view, it's almost a little bit passive. If I misunderstood you, Ms Webster, I'm sorry, but if the requirement is for JCP to maintain regular contact, does the department ever step in? How often would you step in and ask questions about these sorts of things rather than waiting for JCP to come to you?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Our department, alongside JCP, have a regular monthly meeting which has established around - I think the number is 18 referrals that go through per year. It's an opportunity to talk about anything that might be emerging in the work that's going on. Our director of strategic commissioning is part of that meeting. Our executive director of services children, youth and families is a part of that meeting, alongside JCP staff. I'm simply saying that's a really great place for communication and dialogue around -

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you for that. Is there ever, though - I know that the contract that was promised to JCP during an election campaign is now in place, but does the department ever - what's the process for going into JCP's records? A kind of spot check audit process? Because it sounds like it is possible that some things are happening that the department is - I'm not saying there's anything inappropriate necessarily - but that the department is maybe not aware of in terms of JCP and activities with kids?

Ms PALMER - With regard to the agreement, there is a requirement for quarterly reporting on outcomes and risk management. There are annual reports throughout the agreement's duration. There's program evaluation requirements, key performance indicators, compliance with the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act*, coordinated referral processes, along with quite an intense and constant schedule of meetings that are locked in to be having those.

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CHAIR - Monthly meetings?

Ms PALMER - They're just the required ones. It's important to have those set meetings in place, so time doesn't get away with you. That's not talking about conversations that are had or meetings that are had outside of that.

CHAIR - Yes, but there's no accountability around that, minister, is there? I'm asking about oversight. I'm asking about documented oversight and accountability for activities. So, a monthly meeting and quarterly or annual reporting are limited.

Your travel policy might shed light on this when you bring it back to us with more information on what's documented, what the risk assessment looks like, what has to be reported to you specifically about those particular kinds of activities - that's probably going to be in information you bring to us in response to the question you took on notice. I accept that. But that's what I'm more interested in, because I don't think quarterly reporting, annual reporting, monthly meetings where you have a chat are necessarily going to be the level of documentation and accountability I'm looking to see whether it's there or not.

I'm mindful of time and that we're beyond the time we were going to have a scheduled break. I think we will probably take a 20-minute break so that people have a proper opportunity to refresh themselves. It's 11.52 a.m. so we will come back here at 12.12 p.m. and resume our hearing then. I think we'll probably follow-up and continue talking about some of these matters, because I know that there are still some questions that we wanted to follow up on with it. We'll stop the broadcast for 20 minutes.

The committee suspended from 11.53 a.m. to 12.12 p.m.

CHAIR - Before we get back to questions, minister, I think you had some answers you wanted to provide to us from earlier.

Ms PALMER - I do, thank you very much, Chair. It was about curriculum, so I will pass to Jenny Burgess.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you, minister and through you. I have some more details on - first of all the consultation then the implementation and evaluation. The educator consultation involved 10 primary school teachers: eight from government schools and two from non-government schools. The teachers were asked about their professional learning needs, their implementation leadership and the role of the safeguarding leads in this space as well. Then, as I mentioned previously, the external consultation was with members of Laurel House and SASS, and their role was to provide insight into trauma-informed practice and curriculum delivery from their context. There were also some desktop research and victim/survivor perspectives in that consultation process and a review of the 'Take Notice, Believe Us and Act!' documentation to make sure that that was incorporated.

The implementation planning is underway and, as part of that, will include the evaluation of the program. The model for the evaluation will take into consideration the way that we're evaluating the literacy implementation initiative. So, there's a systemised practice and way that we will be doing that, which involves implementation science around the factors of explore, prepare, deliver and sustain model.

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The things that the implementation will go to will be:

- the staff readiness and the capacity, so, how we'll be preparing them to ensure the effectiveness of that in the latter half of 2026;
- the community and family engagement component, and how effective we've been at bringing families along with us and raising awareness of families;
- evidence-informed design, that's whether it's best practice implementation;
- the trauma-informed pedagogy and the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum;
- the equity and access issues, so how have we supported all schools to implement the curriculum effectively regardless of their location or their sector; and
- the usability of the documentation, the video, the booklets and those sorts of things.

Ms ROSOL - While we have information for previous questions, I also had the questions around the CSO, the number of children who don't have CSOs?

Ms PALMER - The team is working behind the scenes. Actually, the secretary can answer that now.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Splitting it up into the three regions again. Beginning in the north, we have 203 children allocated to a child safety officer and 69 who are not - 203 and 69. In the north-west, we have 135 children allocated to a child safety officer and 89 who are not. In the south, we have 381 allocated to a child safety officer and 253 who are not. That totals 719 children who are allocated and 411 who are not. For those children who don't have an allocated worker, there is a process in place. They do have care plans, they do have care teams and there is a point of contact for them within particular teams that they can reach out to for support or for other professionals to make contact with.

Ms ROSOL - The other part of my question then was about the care teams: how many teams there are, how many staff are allocated to those teams in each area. I don't know if you have that information yet, but that was another part of the question that I asked.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Can I ask a clarifying question? My interpretation of that is that you're asking about how many groups of staff do we have with each practice leader and how many teams do we have in each region, or is that not correct?

Ms ROSOL - There has been a model of care teams which we got information about through budget Estimates last year. There were quite a few in the south and I think there was one in the north. It's those teams. How many staff are in the teams and how many children are allocated to those teams because they don't have a CSO of their own?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Just to relay that back so we really understand and get the right information for that question: those are the teams where they were taking a team approach to responding to children - and yes, you are right, there are a couple of teams in the south. You're

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wanting to know how many children fall under the remit of that team approach to responding to children?

Ms ROSOL - Well, I'm assuming that's the 411, but how many staff are working in those teams was the question I asked earlier.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Okay, thank you and we'll come back to you with that response.

CHAIR - Also, just a follow up on an answer you gave there in relation to the care teams. The children who don't have an allocated worker but do have an allocated care team and a care plan, is there a specified number of times that care team has to meet and interact with that child? Would all those care plans be up-to-date, as we would understand it? How frequently are they reviewed and updated? Is it recorded how often the care team is meeting in relation to that unallocated child - unallocated to a worker?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes, those meetings are recorded. You asked a number of questions, so I'll do my best to go back through them. Firstly, within every child's care plan, it is stipulated how regular the visits should be, and that becomes our KPI measure for adhering to that within those situations where children have a care worker. For other situations, where there is a care team in place and they don't necessarily have a key child safety officer, there will be someone in that team who is really regularly visiting, checking in, and responding to that particular child.

CHAIR - My question about frequency of that - is there a designated frequency, so we know that things aren't slipping under the radar?

Mr WHITCOMBE - It would be stipulated within that particular child's care plan.

CHAIR - And compliance with that be documented somewhere, so we'd know how well we're doing in terms of complying with the care plan?

Mr WHITCOMBE - We certainly monitor our timeliness of children's visits within care plans.

CHAIR - You monitor and report on that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, we do. We know that our regularity of adhering to our timeframes around child visits was really at a low point earlier this year. It's risen by about 20 per cent. It's gone from about 30-something-per-cent into the 50 per cent percentile. So, we've seen an improvement in practice, and we're continuing to focus in that area, to see all children seen on time.

CHAIR - We spoke about this in Estimates a couple of weeks ago, but for the purpose of this committee it's good to have some of that discussion on the record here.

I'm going to return to the topic we were talking about before the break, about the funding and the contract with the JCP program. The area I want to go to, minister, is in relation to the evaluation that's been conducted of that program. We've had some information from you in our Chamber in answer to questions about that, so I don't really need to have a full description of the evaluation.

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The parts that I'm interested in hearing about today in relation to that evaluation is: who's undertaking it? How was that organisation or individual, or whoever, selected? What steps have been taken to ensure the evaluation will include matters that have been raised in terms of concerns around the program or brought to your attention around the program? What steps have you taken to ensure there's going to be that critical distance maintained between the evaluator and the JCP Youth program itself, given Tasmanian professional networks are fairly well enmeshed?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I will pass to the secretary for the details of that, but I think that evaluation body of work is going to be really important to actually see the outcomes that we believe are quite fantastic with JCP.

My understanding is that procurement arrangements to engage a contractor to evaluate the BEAST Program are now progressing, and a request for quotation to evaluate the program, I understand, is imminent. I'll pass to you, secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - That's really all that we can add. Obviously, there would be the need for an independent evaluation, hence the request for a quote. The contract says that it has to be undertaken within three years of the contract period. Actually, I believe it's 18 months of the contract period, in this case, and it's important that the program has been operational for a reasonable period of time to inform that. That's underway.

CHAIR - To explain that timeframe a bit more then, we're going to go through a whole three-year contracting period with this organisation, and we won't have completed the evaluation by the end of that three-year period, by the sound of it?

Ms WEBSTER - No, sorry I have corrected myself - it's 18 months.

Ms O'CONNOR - Halfway through the contract?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, correct.

CHAIR - Eighteen months from when the procurement of the successful person putting in for this work -

Ms WEBSTER - No, sorry, I probably wasn't quite clear. The contract commenced in February 2025; the evaluation, as I understand it, has to be completed within 18 months.

CHAIR - Regardless of when the person or organisation who is doing it is appointed?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, that's my understanding. I will confirm that with Mr Whitcombe.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you, secretary. The notes that I have say:

The evaluation of the program is to be required to be undertaken within the three years of the contract period.

CHAIR - Right. Not by August next year, then; by the end of a three-year period - February 2028?

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Ms WEBSTER - Yes. We're just about to release the procurement for that now. We're not waiting till the end of the three years, is what I'm saying.

CHAIR - I understand, but we won't have the results of the evaluation until the end of the contract period.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I disagree with that.

CHAIR - By all means, please explain, but it sounded like that's what you described.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I wouldn't anticipate the length of the evaluation taking the next two-and-a-bit years. I would absolutely hope that we're getting much earlier information through the evaluation. We will want to see that in terms of the way that we set up the evaluation, procurement -

CHAIR - The terms of reference for it are written, or not written yet?

Ms WEBSTER - I believe we're very close to them being released, so they would be written, but we can confirm that.

CHAIR - Are you able to share that with the committee?

Mr WHITCOMBE - The request for quotation - absolutely. Yes.

CHAIR - Then the expectation of the terms of reference is going to be ready at what point?

Ms WEBSTER - They would have to be ready for the letting of the contract, so the evaluator would need to see the terms of reference before they were able to say they could undertake those.

CHAIR - The committee could request that you share that with the committee at the earliest opportunity once they're completed?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, I can follow that up now.

Ms ROSOL - Can I ask a question about the evaluation? Are you planning a one-off evaluation? What's the timeframe for the evaluation? Sometimes people can have a short-term response that might show up positively in evaluation, but over time they don't sustain change. How long will the evaluation period be, or will you be checking in over a period of time?

Ms WEBSTER - We haven't finalised that as yet. The process would be that we would be quite flexible within the terms of reference, and usually we would have a conversation with the evaluator around what might be useful to be included as well.

Ms PALMER - I think my expectation would be that we need to start the evaluation after there's been enough time for there to be something substantial to evaluate. It has to be within that three-year contract. My expectation is that once that evaluation has come to fruition, part of the department's responsibility would be to hold JCP to account with regard to that evaluation. I know that JCP is very keen for this evaluation process to start. They are really

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wanting to get that feedback and that understanding, which is fantastic, that they are wanting to be so engaged in that process.

What we're really looking for are - what are the outcomes for participants, you know? How do we measure that? That's the work being done now.

My expectation, and the advice I've received, is that we'll be able to go out for this by the end of the year. We can certainly bring that information to this committee, about what that looks like.

CHAIR - That's fine. I'm going to push back on you, though, minister, about starting an evaluation once something is in place and has had time to be established. Actually, all best practice around evaluation would say you start evaluation at the outset of a program and you build it into the rollout of a program and then you have evaluation take place over time, so you can see not just its short-term impacts but enduring impacts as well. I don't believe it is good practice to start well down the track, but I'll leave that with you.

If you're going to be getting something in place by the end of this year at least it's not quite one year into a three-year contract but still, we could be placed and not have something to look at before the end of the contract.

Ms PALMER - It is also important to remember that there is that quarterly reporting as well. That's been occurring the whole way through and that is certainly in addition to that evaluation as well.

Ms ROSOL - I feel like it's the wrong way round, like all this money's been given to something.

CHAIR - I know, we're working backwards. Any other questions?

Ms O'CONNOR - I've got a quick question on when you do that evaluation. One of the things you'd be looking for obviously is outcomes and whether it's working for the kids. Does that evaluation include talking to some of the young people JCP has been working with?

Ms PALMER - My expectation is that it would. I think the voice of the child is one of the most important aspects of that evaluation, so that would certainly be my expectation and the secretary's. We're pretty big on that.

Ms WEBSTER - If there was something that came up early in the evaluation that we needed to address or we needed to speak to any organisation about, we would absolutely do that. We wouldn't wait till the end of that evaluation process.

Ms PALMER - That's right.

Ms ROSOL - Staying with JCP Youth, a question around the night-time patrols they do. Do you have any information about how they conduct those patrols, how many go out on them, what they do when they find young people, where they take them? Do you have some details on that that you could share, please?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we certainly do.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - I would not characterise them as patrols; that's certainly not the way they reference them within the agency.

CHAIR - It is in the media.

Mr WHITCOMBE - They do have a community presence and that's because they're interacting with young people where they're at. I would have to seek more information about how often they're out in the community and working with young people in that way.

CHAIR - I will quote an *Examiner* article from 22 October this year regarding the operations of JCP Youth and what they do in the community. They specifically said:

We patrol through the CBD. We have hotspot patrols around the northern suburbs. We identify what young people are out on the streets.

Another quote:

Information on young people is then logged into a software program to enable JCP Youth staff to monitor where, when and with whom they saw a young person.

So 'patrols' is most certainly the way they characterise their activities out on the street, just for clarity.

Ms PALMER - I will also add that we've had our executive director go out and be part of this program -

CHAIR - I saw that on social media.

Ms PALMER - It was really fantastic to have that insight.

Ms ROSOL - JCP Youth has reported that they maintain a database. What information do they report to you from the patrols or the night-time endeavours?

CHAIR - Just call them patrols.

Ms ROSOL - Do they share when they pick up a young person?

Ms WEBSTER - I guess from our perspective, some of the work that JCP Youth does are not referrals from the service. We fund, I think, 54 positions statewide as part of their funding agreement, so some of that extra work they do is not in relation to the referrals from the department. In terms of the interactions with the agency, it would be very much about those referrals. Many of those young people we are aware of.

I think the other thing we need to remember is that the characterisation of the monthly meetings does not take into consideration the incidental conversations that are also had between Community Youth Justice and all our service providers in a regional area, so we not would not necessarily be aware of all of that. It's important to remember that the work that JCP do, to my understanding, is not just in relation to the funded positions for the organisation.

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Ms ROSOL - If they pick up a young person off the street somewhere, do they inform you of what they've done? Is there a report that goes to you that they've picked up a young person at this place at this time, because how would you know if they had a care and protection order or not? How would you know if they were referred? What information sharing is there from JCP Youth to you so that you know what they're doing with young people that you may have referred to JCP Youth or may be in care? How is that information shared and how are you tracking that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I wouldn't expect in their case management all the interactions they have with young people to be coming through into our system. I don't think that's reasonable or should be occurring. What I would expect to be happening for those young people that we've referred is that they will have care teams and care plans in place around them. JCP is a really important part of those care teams and that's where the information about what might be happening for a young person, what other supports might need to be in place, that's where those conversations are happening. You lift that up a level and on a monthly basis we have those operational meetings where, again, any issues are flagged and there's opportunity for discussion about those particular young people as well if there are things that need to be addressed at that operational governance level.

Ms ROSOL - So if a young person is picked up off the street and taken into their care and they become the carer for them, you potentially wouldn't know about it until the monthly meeting when they provide a report?

Mr WHITCOMBE - No, I don't think that's what I described. What I described was the situation where those people who are directly involved in the care plan and the care team around that young person, that's where the conversations would be happening on a really regular basis.

CHAIR - To step in here, if I may, we're not talking about conversations. We're talking about how it is reported and what activities are undertaken with a young person, say, who's been referred to the program who's on care orders? For example, if they're picked up and they stay overnight at a JCP facility, where is that reported back to the department?

Ms WEBSTER - The requirement is that JCP has to get consent from the guardian. If the child is on a care and protection order, it's very clear - and obviously as secretary some of that I delegate to people in the regions - that consent would have to be obtained from the department.

CHAIR - Consent to be involved in the program, or consent for any instance of, for example, taking that child into care overnight?

Ms WEBSTER - My expectation would be if that child is taken into care overnight, the guardian would have to give consent, like any parent would have to give consent for that child.

CHAIR - What auditing is done, then, against the records kept by JCP that they have children in their care overnight and whether you, as the department and the guardian, have requested consent for that?

Ms WEBSTER - I'm not aware of any specific auditing that has occurred on that basis.

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Ms LOVELL - If they engage with a young person at night after hours and decide that young person needs emergency care overnight, what is the process for JCP Youth to gain consent from the department? How do they find out if that person's under a care and protection order? Who do they contact? How is that consent provided?

Ms WEBSTER - There are a couple of things. I will let Mr Whitcombe answer because it is quite an operational question, but it depends on the age of the child as well. If they're a younger child there's certain things that would happen. If the young person is 16 and they're interacting with them, the young person may not tell them that they're on a care and protection order. They're a mature minor. It depends very much on a case-by-case basis, but I'm not sure if Mr Whitcombe can provide a bit more operational detail.

Mr WHITCOMBE - If there are any child safety matters or issues around the care and protection of a young person, JCP will work through both the ARL during the day, the advice and referral line, and the after-hours contact line in conjunction with our service if there are any matters that might require some sort of care arrangement to be established and how that occurs and what the decision-making looks like within that, so using those mechanisms.

Ms LOVELL - The question is, then, what checks are being done to make sure that is the process being followed? If they have a young person who might not understand themselves that they're under a care and protection order, or don't want to tell them that, they know that young person needs emergency care and want to provide that care, but they don't know whether they're under a care and protection order or not, what's the process then?

It just feels to me like there would likely be instances where there are children under care and protection orders - and maybe that consent is not being sought overnight because of the circumstances. What processes are in place to make sure that that's not happening?

Mr WHITCOME - Through you, minister. That is down in a level of detail that's hard to quantify. What we do know is that JCP has processes in place. If they're working with a young person and they don't know their situation and there's care involved, they will reach out. There will be a conversation on that day, on that night, with our service to work out what needs to happen for a particular young person.

Ms WEBSTER - Can I just make a point, too? I wouldn't want it to be characterised that all young people who are coming into contact with the youth justice service are on a care and protection order because that is actually not the case.

CHAIR - No, I don't think that's what anyone is suggesting.

Ms WEBSTER - I just want to make sure because there's been a lot of discussion around care and protection and youth justice and they're two quite different things.

CHAIR - Sure, but children under the care of the state and their intersection with the youth justice system is of particular interest to us and we are holding our responsibilities as a state. The thing that I find disturbing, potentially, about what's just been described is the idea that conversations happen. I'm interested in what's documented and on any given night, are we aware of any children in the care of the state, on care and protection orders, who are staying in in JCP safe houses, or however they're referred to - overnight respite? Would we know beforehand? Would we know afterwards? Is it documented somewhere and say, for example,

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provided in the monthly reports? I'm trying to clarify what's documented, not what conversations happen.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I suggest that our professional practice standards would be consistent about the importance of recording as part of what we do. I'd expect that those matters absolutely are recorded in our system. I would like to also add something to what I said before. JCP works with young people who are referred to them. They're not working with a range of other young people who they may just come across. This is about the young people who are referred to their service.

Ms ROSOL - To clarify, there was a question I asked earlier that's got lost in the other things we've talked about. How many staff are on the patrols? How many JCP staff are on the patrols? Do you know that? Is there one, two? How are they operating in terms of numbers of staff?

Ms PALMER - Ms Rosol, we can come back to you with that. We will try to do that before the end of the session.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Chair, you asked how many children are in self-selected placements which, I think we all agree is not the language, but that's the question and regional breakdown.

Average children under care and protection orders in self-selected placements, 2025-26 to November, in the north the total is - and, obviously we don't report under five - in the north the total is 8.4; in the north-west it is 5.4, I think that's right; and in the south it's 27.4, so it's 4 per cent of all of our children who are on current protection orders.

CHAIR - Thank you for that answer. I think we're going to move on to another area. Ms Greene has questions.

Mrs GREENE - I do. Thank you. I would like to ask about the Office of the Custodial Inspector's report that we received recently about the incident that happened at Ashley detention centre with a young person and a spit hood. The young person reported that he couldn't see, it was hard to breathe, and that a security officer had pulled a chunk of his hair. Also in that report, young people said that, of the private security company: 'They tell us private stuff about other kids at Ashley'; 'You have to wait for ages for them to pick you up'; 'They swear at you and call you names'; 'They don't let you have food or drinks, but they get to eat and drink...'; 'They're really rough' with them; 'They won't talk to you or tell you their names'; 'They put the handcuffs on too tight so it hurts'; 'You have to go to the hospital with handcuffs on and everyone stares at you'; and 'It would be better if youth workers took us to places because they can support you and that.'

That was a pretty rough read for all of us when that was put before us recently. My question to you, minister, is how does the department ensure that transport contractors or security contractors comply with child safe standards outlined in the commission of inquiry recommendations?

Ms PALMER - It was certainly concerning to us when we became aware of this. The policy is very clear, is my understanding, that spit hoods and makeshift spit hoods are prohibited.

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I'm going to hand to the secretary for some more detail, but we are now looking at what work we need to do with regard to, particularly transport of young people. We've looked at a number of the recommendations that have come out of that report and what we would be able to do. Certainly, I think the voice of the child in this space, around having someone that they know - a youth worker, another person with them - is something that we're taking very seriously as we move forward with this. I will pass to the secretary for the details on that.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you, minister, through you. We're currently at the final stages of contract finalisation and negotiation for a new contract for transport of young people. We're working through that contract to determine what expectations we would have around the transport provider, but also expectations of us around handing over referrals from us, how the young person is doing in Ashley, any concerns that they might have, so the transport worker is fully informed about any concerns, any trauma that the young person might have, or any bad news or things like that that might occur. We are finalising that.

It is my intention that the deputy secretary and I will meet with the provider and work through expectations and a genuine communication process. The key point for us is transport of children and young people, that's the service and that service should comply with all the requirements in terms of that young person being under the care of the secretary, essentially, while they're in youth detention. That would be my expectation.

It would be fair to say that we have a bit of work to do with communication as well with that organisation. It's very clear that we have some work to do and we want to make sure that we do that work to support our young people and our staff and workers. We would all prefer - and that report contains a letter that I wrote to the young person and their response - that a youth worker does accompany them on that transport.

We have some additional staff who have just commenced at Ashley. There are some additional staff that are commencing in January. We're very pleased to be able to induct quite a large number of staff. That will provide an opportunity for us to prioritise the opportunity for a youth worker to attend the transport. Obviously, we have to make sure that we maintain safe staffing at the centre. There is work to do on that, but the work is underway and well advanced.

Communication is a key around making sure that everyone's aware of what challenges the young person has in that transport; what we can do to protect staff, sometimes that can be a really challenging period of time; and, as we said in the report, we've accepted those recommendations or accepted in principle.

There's a new van that we have ordered; there's one that we will also place in Hobart. Mrs Greene, you mentioned delays in transport - that should address one of those concerns about the delay in waiting for the van to arrive.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. I have another question about the use of contractors. It's probably more in relation to transport, but is it in their induction content around what's appropriate in terms of use of force, or spit hoods, or how they engage with a young person?

Ms WEBSTER - Part of the new contract arrangements will be part of that. I think the relationship contract management onsite at Ashley Youth Detention Centre is also very important, but it would be the expectation that there is an induction process underway and that is our responsibility. That's why I said the expectations need to go both ways. We have

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expectations of the provider, but they should also have expectations of us of what they should receive in terms of training and support.

Ms LOVELL - So there hasn't been a required induction process until now?

Ms WEBSTER - No, I'm not saying that. We will seek to tighten up that induction process to make sure it covers everything that we need to cover, so that is part of our overall improvements. If we have additional people who come with the security company, we will be making sure we know we can induct them at the time and those sorts of things.

Mrs GREENE - Referring back to that incident, there was mention in the report that there weren't appropriate vehicles for transport for security use. Are they using government vehicles or their own vehicles provided by the company?

Ms WEBSTER - The arrangement is that the department purchases the vehicles.

Mrs GREENE - Was that not the case previously?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, it was, but the vehicles are not as fit for purpose as what we're looking for now. We're improving the vehicles.

Mrs GREENE - In the annual report, I believe \$240,000 was provided to that particular company for services. Were there any other services engaged for the transport of young people from AYDC?

Ms WEBSTER - No, that was the contract arrangement for the service at the time.

Mrs GREENE - You've partly answered this, but do contractors receive training around trauma-informed care and cultural safety when transporting children, particularly those with complex needs or Aboriginal children and young people?

Mr WHITCOMBE - What I can say is that there's a tailored one-day secure transport training package that's been developed to strengthen trauma-informed relational approaches to safety, including responding appropriately to spitting and other high-risk behaviours. There's also been updated awareness, de-escalation and protection training which supports safer decision-making and reduces escalation risk, and the mandatory safeguarding training and working with vulnerable people registrations are now centrally verified through an enhanced induction system before any contracted personnel undertake transport duties.

Mrs GREENE - Are you able to table the current procedures around use of force and use of isolation for contractors at AYDC?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, that would be appreciated.

Mr WHITCOMBE - As a caveat to that, I'm not sure there will be a policy for contractors around isolation. It would be to do with use of force.

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CHAIR - Perhaps you could provide the isolation policy that relates to AYDC generally. Presumably if there was any circumstance under which during transport that needed to be utilised, then that would apply?

Mrs GREENE - Do those contractors wear body-worn cameras? What type of safety and security is put in place so incidents can be reviewed afterwards if required?

Ms PALMER - I'd have to go to the secretary for whether there's body-worn cameras now, but I can say that's something that's very much part of our consideration moving forward. Where you would have a custodial youth worker accompanying a young person during those stages of transport, the use of body-worn cameras and dual-channel radios on transports is something that is being explored to allow that further level of safeguarding for children and young people during transport to and from AYDC, recognising that most commonly, that can be quite a traumatic and stressful time for a young person. So that's -

Ms O'CONNOR - Can I just check there are cameras in the vehicles themselves?

Ms PALMER - For that detail, I would need to check with Peter. My comments were about moving forward. That's where I think there is an opportunity.

CHAIR - Mrs Greene, further questions on that?

Ms PALMER - Excuse me, Chair, we have some more answers for you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms BURGESS - This is the final residual one around the curriculum and the cost of the consultant, which was \$72,600.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms ROSOL - Going back to the Custodial Inspector's report, I asked last year in budget Estimates about essential security and I was told they undergo training. They all have Working with Vulnerable People checks, undergo training and familiarisation with the centre and our processes in putting cuffs on for transport. When the Custodial Inspector did their review, it was a 13-minute generic safeguarding video module, so thank you for the update on the training that's in place now. My question is, why did it take until the Custodial Inspector's investigation happened for more thorough, proper training to be implemented for private security staff?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I just want to acknowledge that I don't think what was put in place at the start was adequate. I think that's why we are strengthening it now. At the time that the contract was put in place within the service that I lead, there was a very newly established emerging Youth Justice operational team that was just finding their feet and was very small. There wasn't the appropriate back office support in place for Ashley Youth Detention Centre to really support the contract in the right way. We're building, we're learning and we're improving on that.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

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CHAIR - It must be a longstanding arrangement. This has been a substandard arrangement in place for many years. How long have we been having private contractors do this work for us? Decades?

Mr WHITCOMBE - The contract with Essential Security was new. I won't give the exact timeframes, but it was new at the time.

CHAIR - Presumably there was another contact prior to that with a private operator. Would that be correct?

Ms WEBSTER - That's my understanding.

CHAIR - Right, a substandard arrangement in place for potentially decades.

Ms WEBSTER - I think continual improvement is what the deputy secretary said.

CHAIR - Well, now it sounds like that and that's really positive. I absolutely thank you for acknowledging that that was required and is now being addressed. But, as Ms Rosol said, it's a shame it took until the Custodial Inspector happened to take a look at that specific aspect.

Ms PALMER - I can confirm that the transport company now has been contracted since August 2023, and I'm advised that the contractor prior to August 2022 was Wilson Security.

CHAIR - It would be interesting to track how many complaints were made by young people transported in, say, the five years leading up to the Custodial Inspector deciding to look at it, and how many of those complaints then maybe didn't amount to enough to be actually addressed through continual improvement.

Ms ROSOL - Page 89 of the Custodial Inspector's report states that Ashley Youth Detention Centre leaders expressed frustration that they have not received additional funding for transport, despite requests. They considered that rostering an extra worker to accompany children and young people would resolve many transport concerns. I know that you've said more staff have now been put on, but I'm looking at the DECYP annual reports for 2023-24 and 2024-25 and there has actually been a drop in staff employed in custodial youth justice.

Can you explain that drop there, the extra staff you've put on, how that fits and how many there are? Also I'd love to know what are the vacancies in Ashley Youth Detention Centre at the moment? We've got these figures for the number of staff there and they're not adequate to meet the need. What are the vacancies? What are we really dealing with in terms of staff on the ground?

Ms PALMER - I'll get the team in the background to get the information about those vacancies, but we can certainly talk to what we're doing to boost that workforce.

Ms WEBSTER - Mr Whitcombe will have the actual numbers, but I think it's fairly safe to say that there's a fair bit of rebuilding we've been doing at Ashley Youth Detention Centre and it's really important to have the right staff in place. We have, in the last 18 months, worked really hard to make sure we have the right systems, the right processes, and the right people in the organisation. But, I think what you're describing there is that process of rebuilding, probably following the commission of inquiry, if I'm quite frank, around those numbers.

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Ms ROSOL - Surely the positions, the FTE allocation would have still been there even if the staff weren't there? This seems to be a drop in the FTE allocation from one year to the next of almost five positions.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, I'd have to understand the detail of that, but I can tell you that I think we have additional staff starting this month.

CHAIR - It's the current annual report that Ms Rosol is quoting from, compared to last year's annual report.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, my point was I have to get the detail of what the difference was, that's all.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, The up-to-date information that we have as of September is that there were 105.5 FTE custodial youth justice workers and this is down slightly from the 108.38, so a difference of three, which was in March 2025, but it remains higher than the 94.8 FTE in March 2024.

Ms O'CONNOR - What is it today?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Since that particular date, I know we've had nine youth workers start on the floor. They've gone through their induction processes and it's only been within the last three weeks that they've started working directly with young people. I'm also aware of a recruitment campaign that has been pretty extensive. As the secretary alluded to, we have a larger cohort of staff going through our induction process in January next year.

Ms O'CONNOR - That's great.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The number that you quoted is actual FTE at a point in time, it's not the FTE allocation, so it's not -

Ms ROSOL - The employed FTE at that point of time.

Ms WEBSTER - The employed FTE hasn't reduced. I was surprised to hear that because my understanding is we had increased the staffing. There was certainly still a rebuilding process that we had to undertake. There may be some vacancies that we have, but the allocation of FTE hasn't changed.

Ms ROSOL - The figures you gave - the deputy secretary gave just then - they were the actual positions, not the allocated FTE?

Mr WHITCOMBE - They're the actual.

Ms ROSOL - I am interested to know what the vacancies are out there at the moment.

Ms PALMER - I think we have that coming for you.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - I think I have some information to hand in relation to that. I'll just have a quick look. For youth workers at Ashley, we are over our budgeted FTE, quite significantly. In terms of vacancies, I wouldn't describe us as having any vacancies except to say that there are a number of staff who are off on workers comp or other matters that do impact on our day-to-day numbers of youth workers on the floor.

Ms ROSOL - So, you're saying there are no vacancies at the moment in terms of staff at Ashley?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct, against our allocation. However, what we know -

Ms ROSOL - Not everyone's on the floor.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right.

Ms ROSOL - Thanks.

CHAIR - I have some more questions relating to AYDC. Given it's staying open for the time being until there's a new facility, the intent was to make it safer than it had previously been for young people, as we know full well from the commission of inquiry. I'm interested in some of the arrangements around that.

In terms of the body scanners, are they now being used? Are they being used according to policy and, if the answer to that is yes, how do we know that? What auditing is being done to check against the use of those body scanners according to policy?

Ms PALMER - I will go to the secretary for some more details, but I've been to Ashley Youth Detention Centre a number of times, first as Education minister and primarily I was focused on the work of the school. Then I've been a number of times in the last couple of months since taking on this portfolio, so I've seen the body scanner and some of the changes that have been made at AYDC and we can certainly speak to those. We have a number here, secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. In particular, the body scanners are operational, is my understanding. Body worn cameras were introduced -

CHAIR - Can I come to body worn cameras in a minute? Can we stay with body scanners?

Ms WEBSTER - Sure.

CHAIR - I know it's there, I know it theoretically works. But my question is, how do we know it's being used according to policy? Is that audited or is something done to give us that assurance that it's being used according to policy? Whose task is it to do that oversight?

Ms PALMER - Chair, if I could bring to the table, Shane Murdoch. Shane is the Director, Custodial Youth Justice Services.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Murdoch. We'll get you to swear the oath there and then you will be able to be a participant in the evidence.

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Mr SHANE ROBERT MURDOCH, WAS CALLED, MADE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Do I need to repeat my question for you, or could you hear what I asked?

Mr MURDOCH - I heard what you said. Through the minister. Body scanners are used regularly as part of safety and security, particularly when there is a reasonable suspicion that a young person is carrying something on them. Obviously, we want to reduce the prevalence of, I guess, hands-on searches such as pat searching, et cetera. It is used quite regularly. I see them recorded often in our database, but also I see it recorded in incident reporting. What I can say is that, although staff are trained to use the body scanner, I can't say that there's any formal auditing as part of that.

CHAIR - Right. Obviously, there's a policy relating to use of the body scanner. If so, perhaps you could table that policy for us so we can have it as part of the record. If we have a policy relating to that and I presume formalities around using the scanner in that presumably staff members probably have to sign-off on use or in some way document use, so why wouldn't there be some form of auditing or oversight to see that that's being done according to policy?

Mr MURDOCH - Through you, minister. That's noted. That's a good question and we shall follow it up.

CHAIR - Thank you. I would like to ask about body-worn cameras now and it's a similar set of questions around that. I know that they're there. I know that they're used at times. What I'm interested in is, what's the policy for their use and how do we know that they're being used according to policy?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, I might start that off. I can't remember the particular date, but it was some time ago the decision was made to make them mandatory.

CHAIR - Good decision.

Ms WEBSTER - We're undertaking the process of negotiations with the unions around that. That's a change to policy and procedure. Purchasing the body-worn cameras and making sure the policies are tight, but they will be mandatory requirements.

CHAIR - Currently not mandatory? That's coming in at what point?

Ms WEBSTER - As soon as we have the number of body-worn cameras, and we've done that negotiation with the union, they will be mandatory. That's the direction.

CHAIR - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - I might just hand to Mr Murdoch.

CHAIR - Thank you, and I'm going to want to know when that's likely to be in terms of procuring the body-worn cameras. I'm also still interested, even though they're not mandatory at the moment, there must be a policy about their use and how do we know that they're being used according to policy at the present time?

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Mr MURDOCH - The procedures for body-worn cameras are pretty clear, but as they are not currently mandatory, some staff will choose not to use them. As the secretary said, we are currently in negotiations with the unions on a regular basis in terms of moving towards that and working through what some of those barriers for some staff are.

The body-worn cameras themselves, when they are used, are found to be particularly helpful, especially in the review of incidents. It gives another dimension beyond just using CCTV footage, which doesn't cover any verbal interaction because there's no sound attached. The body-worn cameras themselves add a new richness into our ability to review incidents because they do record the variables and the other sort of sound recordings as well.

It's important that we move towards that, given that this is a negotiation and a consultation with unions. We don't necessarily want to put a deadline on that, but it is certainly something to prioritise and work towards, so that we can have global coverage of body-worn cameras which I think is actually contributing greatly to the safety of both the staff and the young people.

CHAIR - I agree that they would be contributing, but also the selective use of them can also be problematic because if you turn a camera on in the middle of an incident you don't see what happened in the lead-in to that incident. Then it can be deceptive in terms of what it's going to show or not show about behaviour.

My impression from what the secretary said, minister, was that it was the procurement of additional cameras, in order to be fully stocked with them for mandatory use, that was the issue.

From Mr Murdoch, it sounds like we still haven't formally put that new position in place because the unions are pushing back on it. It seems, from the way it was described by Mr Murdoch, that there's an issue from some staff who are resistant to this. Can you clarify that this is a definite decision, and there will be a definite timeline in bringing it into play, given it's the safety of children we're talking about here?

Ms WEBSTER - I did indicate that there were also union negotiations and policy and procedures, but it is a decision. It's a decision of the secretary. I've made that decision and we're working towards it. I'm unable to give an actual date, because obviously it's a consultation, but as soon as possible. The decision has been made, and I won't be going back on that decision.

CHAIR - Good to hear. Thank you. Regarding the use of the cameras currently, according to policy, is there any auditing or oversight of that to ensure we have confidence that that's occurring, even in the limited way it is now, according to policy?

Mr MURDOCH - What I would say is that the auditing itself is in the other processes that are in place for what the body worn cameras were introduced for in the first place. That includes incident review committees that occur on a weekly basis. We discussed this the last time.

CHAIR - We did, didn't we, and we discovered that, in fact, I was correct. That it wasn't just a matter of every Wednesday since 1 July, because they hadn't been held every week. I'm glad we did finalise that at the end of our session last time.

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Ms PALMER - Yes, I believe there were two or three, and those meetings were made up - they did double time in the weeks after.

CHAIR - It's always worth asking the questions, though, and asking for the documentation of things actually occurring, so thank you. Yes, incident review committee meetings no doubt utilise the body worn camera footage.

Mr MURDOCH - Yes, and it also gives us a good indicator of the quality of the footage itself. As I said, it adds a richness to the analysis of the situation.

CHAIR - I know we're pressed for time and there are probably members who have other areas to go to. If I can stay with one more in relation to AYDC. I'm interested in restrictive practices, and distinctions between use of isolation and restrictive practices. It's my understanding that, although we would document use of isolation, as per statutory requirement, restrictive practices are not documented in the same way. That's much more discretionary, the degree to which that's documented, and there's no particular rigorous oversight of the use of restrictive practices. I'd like comment on that, and how we ensure that that's not occurring. Noting that it's something that's been raised, say, with the Commissioner for Children and Young People's advocate there, raised by others who have insight into that facility currently, and is potentially problematic because it can be used punitively. It can be used to deprive children of the opportunity to be accessing school and other services.

Mr MURDOCH - The context of the question itself, what I do know is that restrictive practices - and that can be the use of isolation, the use of force, the use of search - those are the three key areas of restrictive practice. What I can say is, as far as I'm aware, all use of restricted practice is recorded and requires authorisation internally, depending on the length of time and the reasons for use of isolation.

The term 'isolation' itself, the use of it can be quite broad. For example, a young person may ask to have 10 to 15 minutes' time out in their room just to help them to self-regulate and de-escalate. Technically, that's a restrictive practice called isolation, even though the young person may actually ask for it. Then it's granted by a member of staff.

But, depending on the reasons why, and the period of time that a young person needs to spend in their room, the level of authorisation increases. From the operations coordinator, who can authorise a short time of a young person being in their room, it then leads towards a centre manager. Then eventually it comes to me to authorise, once I've examined the circumstances and the reasons behind why the young person needs to be in their room for an extended period of time, which, from memory, I think is over an hour.

CHAIR - What I'm interested in is the auditing of that, or the oversight - is it ever gone back and checked that, okay, this documented use of restrictive practice - for example, confining a young person to their room - tallies with what we can actually look for evidence of, for example, on footage or on other records.

Mr MURDOCH - Yes, it will either be tied into footage but also, it's usually included as part of incident reporting - that a young person needed to be kept in their room for a period of time to de-escalate after an incident has occurred. It's in detailed form in terms of time, length of time, reasons why, within our internal database system.

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It would be included if it was part of a post-incident response and it would be included in other areas as well, such as the young person's shift notes, case notes, et cetera, and things like that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I will just add that there's another layer of monitoring and oversight that occurs through the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) reporting mechanism where, as you say, that data and information, and how we're recording, and does it match up, is explored through that oversight mechanism.

CHAIR - We know at the moment that OPCAT oversight is limited by its own funding challenges, but hopefully will be fully operating as we go forward. It is limited in terms of, I'm sure, its ability to actually undertake that full oversight.

I'm mindful of time. I know that Ms Greene wants to go to another area.

Ms ROSOL - We're talking about restrictive practices, but if I use the terminology 'lockdowns', how many lockdowns have there been in Ashley Youth Detention Centre in the last six months?

Mr MURDOCH - Through you, minister. In the time that I've been with Ashley Youth Detention Centre - which has been six months - from memory there have been three, as a result of major incidents that have required the facility to be locked down in order to be made immediately safe. I would need to go back and check if there's been any more over those six months. I can think of three temporary periods of lockdown while we've had to respond to serious safety issues after major incidents.

Ms PALMER - Can I check your question - you were asking about lockdowns of the facility. In that example, you weren't talking about isolation?

Ms ROSOL - I understand that, for recording purposes, if a young person is in isolation it counts as a lockdown. I'm talking more broadly than that - operational staffing, all sorts of reasons for lockdowns.

Mr MURDOCH - Through you, minister. To clarify, so when something occurs, and we have to ask all the young people to go to their rooms temporarily, I can think of two or three in the time that I've been at Ashley in response to those major incidents. We would need to go back and check if there's been any more, but those are all that I can think of right now.

Ms ROSOL - Have there been any instances where there's had to be a lockdown because of staffing - insufficient staff?

Mr MURDOCH - Through you, minister. Yes, as a result of serious short staffing. A normal complement of, say, a shift at Ashley would be 15 youth workers, with one to two operations coordinators on for the day. I can think of one or two days where we have had three or four of that shift not show up for work, for various reasons. As a result, I think last year there was a business continuity plan completed, and that was enacted for the first time this year in response to an incident like that, where we had to actually keep all the young people in the rooms because we only had three or four staff. All the non-operational staff that were able to park their work came onto the floor.

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Then, as a result of that, there's this process called rolling lockdowns. That's where we go from unit to unit to let young people out of their rooms. The school staff get engaged and they're providing school input and education to the young people while they're in their rooms. It's a concerted effort to address that just for the day.

It has to be said that the communication, and the way that it was implemented by the management team at that time, was actually really impressive - this was me fresh coming in - the level of communication with young people, the level of buy-in. It was interesting in terms of going through that process and thinking about not just where we have a business continuity plan where we're putting in all this effort, but how we actually continue that on a day-to-day basis. That was one of the lessons that came out of that.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Can I clarify that was in addition to the two or three days that you were talking about before? And because it was rolling, you didn't include it in those two or three days?

Mr MURDOCH - No, I didn't. It was more in response to the incidents. When we have our business continuity plan enacted, then the results are the same, but it's usually for a very different reason, the fact that we're very short-staffed and we have to manage that resource very carefully from unit to unit.

Ms ROSOL - And you said that was one?

Mr MURDOCH - I think it's been enacted three times since I've been here over the last six months as well.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

CHAIR - Before we move on to another area, I'm interested in oversight and documentation around some of the formalities that should be in place at AYDC; this one being room checks. My understanding is room checks are required to occur at certain intervals, say for example, during the night, and at particularly shorter intervals that are required when there's a higher level of risk that's been identified for a particular young person. I'm interested to know what auditing there is of the way those room checks are documented and whether it actually tallies with what occurred in reality. I presume there's a documentation process that's supposed to be followed that the room checks have occurred. What auditing of that is done?

Mr MURDOCH - I'm sorry, I do not have that information with me at this time. I'd need to ask for it.

CHAIR - Is there an auditing process that occurs to see that is actually done as per policy?

Mr MURDOCH - I don't know the answer to that question. I'll have to ask.

CHAIR - Thank you. We'll come back to you with it on notice.

Mrs GREENE - Further to questions I had earlier around security or private contractors transporting children and young people, is that also happening in the Child Safety Service with

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children on care and protection orders? Are there circumstances that security officers are transporting young people to appointments or to their care?

Mr WHITCOMBE - No, none that I'm aware of.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. My other question is regarding a decision made in New South Wales last year where they banned children in the child safety system from living temporarily in hotels, caravan parks and motels. Can we have an update for what's occurring in Tasmania? Do we have children in our state on care and protection orders staying in hotels or caravan parks?

CHAIR - Or tents?

Mrs GREENE - Or tents?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'm not aware of any matters where young people are staying in hotels, tents or caravan parks. It may be something we could take away to do a further check and return an answer.

CHAIR - That would be good so we can be clear on that.

Mrs GREENE - Yes, that would be useful because there certainly were some cases earlier last year. It would be good if we could have an update on that, please.

Mr WHITCOMBE - What I would add to that is that every week I and my colleagues within our team come together and talk about the young people we're most worried about and that is with a view to making sure all the things they need are in place. Where there are barriers to access the things they need, we're cutting through those things. Through that process, which has been in place for the last few months, I've had no situations come through where young people are in hotels, caravan parks or tents.

CHAIR - We now put them in youth shelters, though, and take up space there to some extent at times. We discussed this in budget Estimates a couple of weeks ago and got some data on that, so that's available on the *Hansard* for Estimates.

Mrs GREENE - Regarding the review of the Child Safety Service and the advice and referral line, can you advise how external stakeholders are being consulted as part of that review?

Mr WHITCOMBE - The review itself occurred through 2023-24 and stakeholders across government and inclusive of our partners who work within the ARL, Baptcare and Mission were deeply involved in that work and the output of the recommendations and report. We are continuing to work with them and walk alongside them in terms of the changes that are occurring as a result of that particular review and report. We met with Baptcare about these particular matters as recently as last week.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, but the other stakeholders, not just those who are contracted within ARL. Have you consulted with other stakeholders who regularly report to the ARL? I was thinking earlier when there was the line of questioning around JCP Youth, if they needed, for example, to make contact with the ARL around care for a young person overnight. We

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know, as part of the ARL review that happened, that the average wait time is around one hour and 22 minutes. I'm keen to see if you have been talking to other stakeholders who regularly need to use the ARL around what needs to be done to improve the service.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I want to provide assurance that yes, we are. The review report itself outlined the stakeholders we engaged with and the development of it. While I recognise that the advice and referral line has at times been frustrating for people in terms of call wait times, we are monitoring data around that particular metric regularly. The latest data I saw had it averaging in the seconds, not minutes, so we've made huge gains in that particular area so that we are a responsive service.

Mrs GREENE - That's good, thank you. Regarding the Change for Children Action Plan, in terms of the investment, what money is available to focus on initiatives around prevention and responding to child sexual abuse?

Ms PALMER - We'll just find some information for you on that. While the deputy secretary is looking for that, could we answer some questions, Chair?

Ms WEBSTER - The question was how many case management teams are operating and how many staff in each team. In the north we have three case management teams operating. There is a total of 18 child safety officers, three practice leaders and two practice managers, and there are 272 children across those three teams. In the north-west we have four case management teams operating, with 17 child safety officers, 18 practice leaders and four practice managers, with 634 children across the four teams. In the south there are eight case management teams operating with a total of 28 child safety officers, four practice leaders and two practice managers, with 224 children across the eight teams.

CHAIR - Right, I think we've got someone else to the table, minister, who we will need to swear in.

Ms PALMER - This is Courtney Hurworth, the chief reform lead of Keeping Children Safe.

Ms COURTNEY HURWORTH, CHIEF REFORM LEAD, KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE, WAS CALLED, DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you - and to answer Ms Greene's question?

Ms HURWORTH - That is really a question for the Premier. The Change for Children Action Plan is a whole-of-government plan that sits across every agency engaged in the reform program, so all 191 recommendations plus all related recommendations, which takes the total number of recommendations in this reform program to about 800. The Change for Children Action Plan hasn't been finalised yet. It's in its final stages and will hopefully be released early next year.

Your question was around prevention. Without going to the direct question about budget, which is still under consideration, Change for Children will have a very strong focus on prevention and we are working with the community services sector in particular looking at not only prevention through the lens of working with children and young people around attitudes

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and other things this committee has considered, but also prevention in looking at people who may wish to abuse children or who have abused children.

In terms of questions about the Change for Children Action Plan and more detail on that, that's probably a question best directed at the Premier because it covers the entire scope of the reform, not just the matters that this particular minister is responsible for.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mindful of time, I know we've got a short question to finish us up from Ms Rosol.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, Chair. I wanted to go back to the Custodial Inspector's report because in it the government has said you support the recommendations of the Custodial Inspector. Here, you've said you support them in principle. However, when we asked the Premier last week he said that the recommendations will be assessed and considered, so it's actually quite different language across the different people speaking on it. Do you still support the recommendations as per the Custodial Inspector's report, or has your position changed at all, and will you be implementing the recommendations?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. The response from me was indirectly to the Custodial Inspector and as the secretary of the department, I've responded. As to those ones that need additional funding, I can't speak for government, so just to be really clear, that's what I meant. Most of them go to policy and procedure, which are things the department can put in place, so I'm speaking from a department perspective, if that clarifies that.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Then my question is to the minister. Will you implement the recommendation around legislation to prohibit and ban spit hoods and improvised spit hoods?

Ms PALMER - We're certainly taking that under consideration.

CHAIR - I think we've reached the end of our time today. Thank you very much to everybody at the table and everybody who's been supporting from behind as well for the time you've made available to the committee.

I need to say that the evidence you've provided at the hearing today is protected by parliamentary privilege as mentioned at the start, and I take this opportunity to remind you that any comments you may make to the media or others outside this room, even if you repeat what you've said here, will not be protected. Do you understand that?

WITNESSES - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. My appreciation to the committee members as well and to the support staff we have here.

The committee adjourned at 1.30 p.m.