

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Thursday 26 June 2008 - Estimates Committee B (Cox) - Part 1

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Thursday 26 June 2008

MEMBERS

Mr Dean
Mr Finch
Mr Wing
Mrs Jamieson
Mrs Rattray-Wagner (Chair)
Ms Ritchie

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE

Hon. Jim Cox, Minister for Police and Emergency Management; Minister for Local Government

Department of Police and Emergency Management

John Johnston, Commissioner
Darren Hine, Deputy Commissioner
Scott Wilson-haffenden, Manager, Finance Corporate Service

Tasmania Fire Service

John Gledhill, Chief Officer
Mike Gallagher, Director of Corporate Services
Michael Brown, Deputy Fire Officer

Local Government Office

Jessie Byrne, Director, Local Government Office
Alastair Scott, Deputy Director, Local Government Office
Greg Brown, Director, Partnership Agreements

Ministerial Staff

Gerald Jones, Adviser for Police

Yasmin Kelly, Adviser for Emergency Management

Jen Butler, Adviser for Local Government

The committee met at 9.30 a.m.

CHAIR (Mrs Rattray-Wagner) - Welcome, Minister. We appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions and source some information on this very important portfolio that you look after - policing, the fire service and the local government area. Minister, would you like to give a short overview of your portfolio?

DIVISION 9

(Department of Police and Emergency Management)

Mr COX - I will take the opportunity to do an overview. It is, as you rightly point out, the very first budget Estimates committee I have attended in this role. It is also the first time that Commissioner Johnston has attended in his role, so it is a first for both of us.

CHAIR - And myself as well, so congratulations all around.

Mr COX - What a wonderful trifecta.

The 2008-09 budget for the department will hit a new high, in excess of \$194 million. It focuses on infrastructure by commencing the upgrade and expansion of three divisional headquarters - Devonport, Glenorchy and Bellerive. The total funding exceeds \$18 million over the next four years. As well as addressing physical infrastructure, the budget will also provide the opportunity to address information technology needed for Tasmania Police. The commencement of automated vehicle location monitoring will improve officer safety levels through an enhanced command and dispatch functionality. That is \$1.3 million that has been devoted to the capital infrastructure required to progress that program. In addition to AVL, the Government has committed \$8 million in 2008-09 for the upgrade of the government radio network. This is to enhance the operability of the network and build upon the \$5 million committed in 2007-08.

The Government not only recognises the value of Tasmania Police but also our State Emergency Service volunteers through the provision of an additional \$100 000 for general-purpose uniforms. The allocation builds upon the additional \$668 000 that has been provided on a recurrent basis since 2004-05 and that is part of the SES in partnership with a local government initiative.

In addition to budget initiatives, it is pleasing to note that the department has successfully agreed on an enterprise agreement with the Police Association of Tasmania and that provides Tasmania Police salary increases for the next three years. This agreement was reached within the forward Estimates and to the satisfaction of all members. I want to provide you with a handout today that we have and that clearly indicates Tasmania is the safest State in the nation and I will like to give you some statistics of that.

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Total offences have reduced by 47.6 per cent over the past 10 years. That includes a decrease of 5.3 per cent when compared to last year which equates to 37 pure offences each week.

Home burglary is down by 8.9 per cent compared to last year. That is three fewer homes burgled each week. Business burglary is down 21.7 per cent compared to last year. That is three fewer businesses burgled each week. Car burglary down by 17.9 per cent when compared to last year, or eight fewer cars burgled each week.

The level of serious injury crashes has declined by 27 per cent over the past nine years.

In addition to these impressive performance results it is also pleasing to note that the public confidence in Tasmania Police remains high and these figures support that. The percentage of people satisfied with services provided by Tasmania Police is 71.5 per cent and that, Madam Chair, is the highest of any State in the nation and 5.3 per cent above the national average. The percentage of people who have confidence in Tasmania Police is 83.2 per cent. Again, above the national average of 81.4 per cent. The percentage of people who believe that police treat people fairly is the highest in the nation at 73.8 per cent and that is some 6.8 per cent above the national average. The percentage of people who believe that most police are honest is 78.6 per cent. Again, above the national average.

So, Madam Chair, it is with those figures and that brief introduction that we look forward to answering the questions from the committee and I thank you for giving us the opportunity.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister, and there were obviously some significant figures and facts in that overview and I am sure that members of the committee will want to explore those further and drill down a bit deeper on those. Obviously in this area, Mr Dean is going to take the lead.

Mr JOHNSTON - Can I indicate, the document that the minister handed out, unfortunately the copies of it were left at the office and they are on the way. So they will be here in a minute or two.

CHAIR - We are very pleased that the minister is not left at the office. So this is the most important person to have.

Mr DEAN - Just in questioning and I know you went through this experience yesterday and I know a lot will be repeated and that is unfortunate.

Mr COX - Of course and that is fine and we accept that. I suspect that some of you, Mr Dean, in a much more methodical manner than perhaps was the case yesterday.

Mr DEAN - It was unfortunate but that was another issue. First of all I want to talk about the government trunk mobile radio network system and it is referred to on page 10.2. We have the two areas, a Tasmanian government radio network project, followed by the trunk mobile radio network upgrade. My first question is what will be the total cost of the new infrastructure that is to be put in place?

Mr COX - The total cost is \$15 million.

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Mr DEAN - I think it said in the papers that the operating costs of that will be increased too. So I want to know, where will the operating cost increases occur? Will it involve more people in that side of it?

Mr JOHNSTON - The operating costs go up predominantly because there will be an increased usage of the radio network. There will be more towers and there will be more receivers and there will be more opportunity for people to get on the network and therefore the costs will go up and therefore the management costs will go up. That is what then absorbs the additional operating costs that are built into the second side of the budget.

Mr COX - There are five new sites being built as well, Mr Dean, so that is all part of that.

Mr DEAN - How many users will be on the site? It is a conjoined function activity isn't it? There are a number of users in this same system or similar?

Mr COX - It is mainly for Tasmania Police and electricity. So two at this stage. I think I know where you are going, but, two.

Mr DEAN - So it is police and electricity. Are you looking at expanding or going any further with that as a government combined service?

Mr COX - We are hopeful that down the track we can combine the services in other areas.

Mr DEAN - What guarantees do we have that this system is going to be a better and more reliable system than the current VIAC system that we have been using for a period of time within the court. The police service have been using it for the past few years.

Mr COX - That was past tense, Mr Dean. There are areas where it dropped out, it did not function, it did not work -

Mr DEAN - Talking under water.

Mr COX - Exactly. The purpose of this is to fix that problem basically. To put it quite simply this now works in those areas, it is being tested, the Commissioner may want to give greater detail on that but this one works in areas the other one did not basically.

Mr DEAN - This brings them back to the digital system as well and gives them security.

Mr COX - Very much so and that was, of course, one of the main reasons for doing this.

Mr DEAN - One of the problems.

Mr COX - Yes.

Mr DEAN - Minister, my question is that we were guaranteed with the other system that it would be the be-all and end-all of communications in this State. It was not so I wonder what has changed. Are we getting better advice this time, is it a better firm, a better operation, are we guaranteed on that? Because we were guaranteed this previously as well.

Mr COX - I hear what you are saying.

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The last one unfortunately was not a good process, it did not work and you are quite right about that. I think a great deal of time and effort went into making sure that this does. The Commissioner may want to give details about the testing or whatever occurred but I am very confident that this will work where the other did have a problem.

Mr DEAN - Because we are talking about a system of huge cost. The previous system was a huge cost to the State as well and it only operated for a relatively short period of time if you look at communications for that expenditure. So as long as we can be guaranteed that the system moving forward provides the police with what they are entitled to that is very good communication.

Mr COX - They are the assurances I have been given by the providers of that service very clearly and very thoroughly. I think that is a fair comment.

Mr JOHNSTON - Can I make one observation and that is that no radio network operates 100 per cent -

Mr COX - I should have put that in.

Mr JOHNSTON - One hundred per cent of the time and whilst this will give us as close as we can get for the sort of money that is being spent, no radio network can guarantee to give you 100 per cent coverage 100 per cent of the time.

Mr DEAN - I think as long as we get well and truly above the 50 per cent and that is about where we were previously.

Mr JOHNSTON - I think it was greater than that but it was not at the desirable levels that it should have been.

Mr COX - It will probably be better than your phone coverage.

Mr DEAN - Well, police were reverting to mobile phones and many other forms of communication so I do not know if it was much better than 50 per cent.

Mr COX - No, the new one hopefully will be, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - I want to talk a little bit about the automatic vehicle location devices. I notice that \$1.8 million has been committed to that this year. So, Minister, what vehicles will be fitted with this device in the first instance?

Mr COX - It is a very timely thing that you should bring that up because we will be launching that today, Mr Dean, so I thank you for that DD so just tear that one up.

Mr DEAN - And this is not a Dorothy Dixier.

Mr COX - No it is not.

CHAIR - Members of the committee, Minister, find that very hard to believe.

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Laughter.

Mr COX - I thank you for the question.

This will be put into how many initially, Commissioner?

Mr JOHNSTON - It is really a case of how far the dollar goes, Minister. The reality is that we have a program of rollout for as many operational vehicles as possible. They will be a mix of single person police station vehicles as well as metropolitan and urban vehicles and the money, of course, will not put these devices into every police vehicle. It is a descending order of priority.

Mr DEAN - Do you have the cost of a unit to a vehicle?

Mr COX - I cannot give you that technical answer Mr Dean I do not know whether -

Mr HINE - Mr Dean part of the structure is that we are doing a business case so it can go out to tender so therefore until we go out to tender we do not know the full cost of the unit. We are trying some basic units at the moment but that is part of the tender process to see what the total cost of the unit is going to be.

Mr DEAN - New Zealand are already using this aren't they to some degree and successfully, so I thought you would have had that.

Mr COX - The other thing too because it is going out to tender we would be reluctant to start talking about dollars for obvious reasons.

Mr DEAN - I was only talking about an assessment of the cost of a unit to a vehicle. I was trying to work out where we are going with it. I would have thought you would have had a rough idea of what a unit will cost and what it will cost to put into a vehicle.

Mr COX - The fact that it is going out to tender means that we may not want to give anyone else the idea of what we expect. It might give someone a heads up, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - It would be easy enough for any contractor to go out and get a unit console with a price.

Mr COX - It probably would.

Mr HINE - We do have a cost Mr Dean but, again, as the minister quite rightly said we know the ballpark figures and what configuration we give them, what capacity to give each unit determines what sort of cost and what data plan that you might want to negotiate with the carrier. All those things come into the overall cost.

Mr COX - But you are right, Mr Dean, it is not new technology, it is technology that is used worldwide and not just in police vehicles. It is used a lot now in trucks and transport in Europe.

Mr DEAN - What discussions have taken place with the Police Association of Tasmania in relation to this? Have they been involved in this the whole way through and are they aware of what is going on and where we are going with it?

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Mr COX - I have regular discussions with the Police Association. I made that a priority the moment I took over this role. I met with them within a matter of days and I continue to meet with them on a regular basis. This has certainly been discussed with them and my belief is that they are more than happy about this. They see this as a safety issue and that is correct. They support this.

Mr DEAN - What is the intended use of it? It has been said that this is for police officers' safety. Is that all it will be used for, or will it be used for other purposes, Minister? I understand that this equipment is so sophisticated, it could, in effect, provide the speed of a police vehicle between two given points, for instance, and it could provide other information of course.

Mr COX - The prime intent of this is to improve real time management of police resources by providing police radio despatches and police supervisors with information on unit status, location and workloads. That obviously gives an opportunity to get a better response time than has previously been the case. It will also enhance efficiency and effectiveness of operation by providing better access to information. Other benefits include: improved occupational health and safety, to which you allude, and a link to project meridian where opportunities exist to improve the efficiency and the development of potential solutions with other emerging technology.

On the unit that is put in, I cannot answer your question because I do not know what technologies that unit will have in it. There are some that are extremely sophisticated and they change almost on a monthly basis.

Mr DEAN - Can you give information or some agreement that the unit is not going to be used for the purpose of catching police out for those things that it could be used for, as I understand it? When you look at this equipment, you see that it could determine the speed of a vehicle at a certain time. Would it be used for those purposes or not?

Mr COX - That is certainly not the intention and it is not the discussion I have had with the commissioner. But just thinking through what you are saying, if the police were doing the wrong thing, would it be such a bad thing that it did?

Mr DEAN - There are times when police need to move quickly -

Mr COX - Absolutely.

Mr DEAN - and they do not always put their lights or their sirens on and they could be in jeopardy and so on. If that is what it is to be used for, one of the primary uses of it, I think that police would become very suspicious of what is going on.

Mr COX - That is not a primary use of it at all but, again, the commissioner might like to comment.

Mr JOHNSTON - I am not sure that I can add anything. Quite simply, it is not a primary intended use. The minister has quite clearly articulated what the intended uses are. If there are supplementary benefits or alternative options for the use of it that come along that help us deliver a more efficient and effective police service, that help keep our police officers safer, then I would not rule anything out.

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Mr DEAN - Obviously there will be, I take it, an agreement put in place between the police service and the Police Association of Tasmania. I think that applies in New Zealand and a very clear position on this device is even legislated or within their standing orders.

Mr COX - That is the first time it has been raised. They have not asked me for that.

Mr DEAN - They may well do.

Mr COX - You may have some information.

Mr DEAN - I am just saying, Minister, that they may well do.

Mr COX - We have asked for lots of things, Mr Dean; we won a couple and lost a couple.

Mr DEAN - I wanted to quickly touch on the impact of fuel consumption within the police service. Is the spiralling cost of fuel really impacting on police services and is the budget sufficient to carry that or does there need to be some adjustment?

Mr JOHNSTON - The answer is quite simple, no. It has no impact on service delivery. All costs have been absorbed within our expenditure for the year so far. We have allocated more of our global budget next year for fuel in anticipation of an increase. Having said that, we also have strategies that we are considering to reduce our carbon footprint, of course, and that will have impacts on fuel costs.

Mrs JAMIESON - Could we have an indication of what those strategies are?

Mr JOHNSTON - Do you want to talk about them now, under this output group?

Mrs JAMIESON - I would. The subject has been raised. Does it come in there?

CHAIR - I would expect that it is most appropriate to talk about it now.

Mr JOHNSTON - Of course we are reducing the capacity of the vehicles by reducing engine size - six-cylinder cars down to four-cylinder cars. We are exploring the diesel options for more and more of our operational cars.

Mr DEAN - Diesel is probably not the way to go. It is probably more expensive to run than petrol.

Mr JOHNSTON - No, we disagree, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - That is what the papers say this morning.

Mr JOHNSTON - I do not care what the paper says.

CHAIR - I was going to say there is a report. I saw that same report, Minister, that diesel cars are not as economical as perhaps the wider community perceive them to be.

Mr DEAN - Don't you say anything, Mrs Jamieson, because yours is not either.

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Mrs JAMIESON - They are economical to run.

Mr JOHNSTON - I think the report I read, Madam Chair, said that the efficient diesels that are being developed in Europe at the moment are better than the hybrid vehicles and have a better resale value and that is the way to go but anyway that is another story for another day. It is one I have some knowledge of, Madam Chair. I am happy to have the discussion.

CHAIR - I can see that you as minister will need to get a full understanding of how you balance one with the other - (a) the need to have a six-cylinder vehicle in the case of a pursuit compared to -

Mr COX - We do not have pursuits.

Mr JOHNSTON - We have managed pursuits.

Mr COX - That is right.

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, I use the words 'explore the options' quite guardedly because I am aware of the debate in relation to diesel-fuelled vehicles versus smaller capacity vehicles versus LPG vehicles and so on. We are having a good look right across our fleet. We have exemptions from government at the moment for operational police vehicles to not have to change the mix of our fleet for them just yet, but we do have some very fuel-hungry vehicles being used in some areas and the first question will be why are we using these fuel hungry vehicles in the areas if we do not need them. That is the first rationalisation step that we will take.

CHAIR - So there is a considerable amount of work, Minister, to be done in this area. Do you see that you will use outside consultants to assist you in making the judgment as to what is acceptable because this is a fairly specialised field?

Mr COX - It is. The Government is already looking at how they can operate fleets, what is the best way to go, and I am sure you have had this discussion with the Premier. I would imagine that was raised.

CHAIR - My understanding from the Premier was that it is a watching brief at the moment.

Mr COX - And so it should be.

CHAIR - Given that it is not a clear pathway -

Mr COX - No.

CHAIR - to what would be acceptable.

Mr COX - I totally support that for no reason other than it is factually correct. It is a changing process. If you had had this conversation two months ago it is different now from how it was then. For instance, Toyota have now been offered something. There is now a car by Honda that was not out a few weeks ago. This is changing on a regular basis and I think in the next couple of years we will have vehicles that we have never heard of. I saw a vehicle being tested in Beijing being made by China and that vehicle had remote driver access and it was also

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fuel efficient. It is a very changing brief and we need to have a look and see what comes up and how we get the best value for money.

CHAIR - I would suggest a remote driver access would not be able to arrest somebody at the end of a pursuit.

Mr COX - No, it is a very scary thing to sit down there and the car slows down as it approaches the car in front of you and you have no control over it but it is actually an operational vehicle.

Mr WING - Especially if you are overtaking.

Mr COX - It was being trialled and not on the road.

Mr DEAN - Has the issue of integrity testing that became part of the new police act some time ago been used at all within the service?

Mr JOHNSTON - The answer to the question is 'maybe' and the reason I put it in that context is there is only the one equation where it could be said to have been used and that was simply in relation to the stealing by a former constable of the tea money at a police station. It was not an integrity test that was set up for that purpose but it could have been interpreted as being one. That is why I use the term 'maybe'. It was not done in accordance with the act that required the commissioner's assent.

Mr DEAN - So we have had one 'maybe' only this year?

Mr JOHNSTON - That is right.

Mr DEAN - There has been no other integrity testing in accordance with the Police Service Act.

Mr JOHNSTON - That is right.

Mr DEAN - That is good. It speaks well of the police service. The other one is the alcohol and drug testing of police. Has any of that taken place? If so, what have been the results?

Mr JOHNSTON - There has been a number of occasions where that provision has been applied and we have not detected any police officer with alcohol in their blood at work in those tests. Each of the tests that were conducted - and I cannot remember the number off the top of my head, but you could probably count them on one hand - have been conducted as a consequence of some information that has been brought to light by someone saying, 'I think so and so has probably had something to drink' and they have been tested.

Mrs JAMIESON - Does that testing include illicit drugs as well?

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes. We do have a regime in relation to testing for illicit drugs but that has not been used in the context that Mr Dean has asked the question, but we have had one or two people who, as a consequence of their transfer to high-risk locations, have been prepared to subject themselves to illicit drug testing on a random basis. That is not in accordance with the act

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but it is actually a different process and I am very pleased to say that on those occasions they have been negative as well.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for expanding on that because I thought my question covered that but it did not quite so I need to be a little bit more careful in the way I ask my questions.

Mr COX - Good backup, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - Yes. Where are we with disciplinary offences by police including any offences and also customer service complaints against police? Can you cover the whole spectrum in relation to that and internal investigations as well for the year now? I can get the previous figures.

Mr COX - I can give you some background on this and the commissioner, I am sure, can add to it. You are after complaints?

Mr DEAN - I was after the disciplinary offences, customer service complaints against police and the outcome, have any police been terminated as a result of any of these, any disciplinary action taken against police as a result of it and are these increasing or decreasing? I can get the figures for the previous year but I have not the figures for this year.

Mr COX - I can give them to you. This year to 31 May there were 58 complaints, which is down considerably.

Mr DEAN - That is in the category of customer service complaints, I take it?

Mr COX - Sorry, that is complaints against police. There were 91 customer service complaints, which is down again.

Mr DEAN - What was that again? There were 60-odd complaints against police -

Mr COX - Fifty-eight.

Mr DEAN - And then 90-odd customer service complaints.

Mr COX - Yes, 91 for customer service.

Mr DEAN - What seems to be the area of concern in customer service complaints? I am not saying that they would all be proven, probably none of them is proven.

Mr JOHNSTON - I am happy to help there.

Mr COX - Please do, I think you are more familiar with them than I am.

Mr JOHNSTON - The majority of customer service complaints are the nature of 'the police officer pulled me over and I wasn't speeding', 'the police officer pulled me over and was rude to me' and they are referred to the district. They are the two major sources of complaints. If you were to categorise them even further I think you would find that complaints about not wearing seat belts is a pretty dominant complaint, 'Yes, I was wearing my seat belt but the police officer said I wasn't' and that is a pretty common complaint that is made in the customer service complaint area. They would be the two major categories and the major subcategory is seat belts.

Mr FINCH - Can I ask a question on that? How far down the line do those 91 customer service complaints go before they are registered as complaints? Let us say somebody is pulled over and they go to see the local commander or something and say, 'I was wearing a seat belt, blah, blah' and the commander says, 'I hear what you are saying, away you go'. Is that then registered as a complaint?

Mr JOHNSTON - That would be my expectation. But like all of these things, not everything gets recorded in the way that you would want it to. This is not a game about trying to generate or not generate statistics; it is about resolving somebody's dissatisfaction with the policing service. If somebody walked into the local inspector - for argument's sake at Deloraine or at Devonport - and said, 'Look this happened,' and the inspector looked at it and said, 'I can understand what you are saying and I can resolve that now.' It probably is not a complaint.

Mr FINCH - It is not mandatory?

Mr JOHNSTON - It is not mandatory that it be recorded as this.

Mr FINCH - It is not mandatory to register that complaint?

Mr JOHNSTON - No, because police deal with complaints from the public about police all the time. Thankfully most of them are dealt with to the satisfaction of the people involved.

Mr COX - Some of the complaints you are referring to, Mr Finch, could even be seen as almost counselling, I guess.

Mr JOHNSTON - And providing advice. Quite often people come in with a misconception about the law. When it is explained to them, they say, 'I am still not necessarily happy but at least I have a better understanding,' so they do not have a complaint as such any more.

Mr WING - A misconception about the role of the police they think that they should be catching real criminals rather than them.

Mr COX - We occasionally get the letters too, and we pass those on. We get the odd disgruntled person, and they are always dealt with very quickly and very efficiently.

Mr FINCH - It begs the question, Minister, when does it register -

Mr COX - When does it become a statistic?

Mr FINCH - Yes, what makes these 91 stand out so that they are registered and end up being in your statistics?

Mr JOHNSTON - I have to confess that I did not bring the definitions with me. We have a customer service charter, which I might indicate is being refreshed right now and there will be a new version of that out soon. That contains information for the commander in the district to ensure that he understands what does and does not need to be registered. A very simple rule of thumb that I would suggest is applied by the commander of the district is where there is an unresolved concern by the public that needs the intervention of the commander.

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Mr HINE - There are specific guidelines in the police manual as guidance to police officers. If it cannot be resolved at the spot, then they are advised to take the customer service complaint and tell the senior officer. So there are specific guidelines for police officers in the manual and in the internal investigations manual as well. The line is quite clear: If you cannot resolve it, you will take the customer service complaint, register it and it goes to the commander. He decides what goes on to it, allocates an officer to investigate it and then it is resolved at the district level or, if there is an internal investigation, there would be other processes if it is a more serious complaint. So it is quite laid out in the police manual.

Mr FINCH - Thank you.

Mr DEAN - Still on recruiting: The information provided to me - and you will tell me if I am right or not, Minister - is that recruiting into the service is becoming harder and not as easy as it used to be. Is that right? And if it is right, what is the position with recruiting? Have we dropped our standards to get the police we need or the people into the academy?

Mr COX - I am delighted to tell you, Mr Dean, that is not correct and in fact recruiting is going extremely well at this stage. One of the programs that I will touch on is the junior constable police college program which I think is an outstanding program. No, Tasmania Police have an ongoing recruitment program. Courses have already commenced in March and May, and the third course is scheduled to commence in September. Each course aims to consist of 24 people, so the courses will train approximately an additional 72 police officers.

The one I was going to touch on is the junior constable police college program. That has engaged 20 young Tasmanians who are completing year 11 and 12 studies around the State. It exposes them to policing as a profession while they complete their college education. The reason I raise that program is that out of the 20 - and the commissioner will correct me - I think there were around 500 applications for those positions. So I would say that the police service is in pretty good hands and looking pretty positive.

Mr DEAN - That is good.

Mr COX - The other thing is that 72 per cent of the members of police recruit course number 1 were aged under 30, the average age now being 25. Nearly half, 47 per cent, of the course members are female, and 38 per cent of the trainees have completed or are undertaking university studies. So I am delighted to tell you no, that is not right.

Mr DEAN - Do we have a full complement of police at the present time? I am wondering whether those coming into the junior constable system are all brought within the service when they graduate from that or do they need to wait for vacancies within the service? How is that working or at times do we go above the numbers?

Mr JOHNSTON - Maybe I can make a couple of general statements first. The first is that we actually had difficulty getting 24 into one of our recent courses and we settled on 22. It was nothing to do with lack of numbers but simply because the timing of our process had got out of kilter. We normally do not have any difficulty filling the 24 for each course, but there was a little aberration in the system and we settled with less. That happens from time to time.

Mr COX - Albeit two.

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Mr JOHNSTON - The issue that you specifically asked is that our prediction is based on attrition rates and what we expect will happen over the foreseeable future. As the minister has already indicated, we have planned for what we think are the necessary intakes to overcome the drop in numbers as will happen over time. The issue in relation to junior constables is that it will take up to 12 months, maybe two years, to filter into the system as effectively as we want. It is a long-term strategy because all the futurists will tell us that the recruiting pool is getting smaller. Therefore we need to do something new and more innovative to make sure that the pool stays large.

We do not seem to be having any difficulty in attracting applicants at the moment. You quite rightly point out that there is absolutely no way in the world that we will reduce our standards just simply to get numbers. So if people do not meet the standards then we will meet the challenges that we get confronted with at that particular time.

The other point that you asked in relation to do people have to leave before people can come in, the answer is no. If we get particularly good applicants and we want to attract them there and then, but the next course does not go in for a month or something like that, the commander of human resources is more than able to offer that particular applicant the opportunity to come and join us as a trainee in advance of the induction day, to give them a job to make sure that they do not wander off somewhere else and we then lose them. There is a whole raft of these strategies in place. To talk about numbers, as you know, our numbers fluctuate up and down all the time, but they are well within the ranges that we would normally expect.

Mr HINE - If I could indicate that we are actually three above our allocation at the moment but we normally have a resignation rate of between four and 4.5 a month. Therefore with the next course that comes in September we normally adjust that number to suit what our allocation may be at that stage. So it can be 24 for the course or it can be 20. That is where we make the adjustment, because it is one of those predictive figures. But our numbers are probably the best they have ever been. And the recruiting for the numbers is quite good at the moment.

Mr DEAN - Those going through the academy - and I am talking about the 12-month period we are in now because I have the figures previously - is there a drop-out rate? Have any of them been dismissed from that service?

Mr COX - I know that one dropped out for personal and family persons. I am not sure beyond that.

Mr JOHNSTON - It is extremely low. In fact, we are unlucky if we lose one per course. I think our current rate is one per course.

Mr HINE - It is probably not even one per course at the moment. Probably every two or three courses we might lose one for various reasons such as the recruit realising it is not the job for them. Even though we go through a rigorous selection process, they suddenly realise it is not the job for them, or for various other reasons. So probably every two or three courses we might lose one. It is quite rare. And of course we have an assistance program in there. If someone is having trouble we will give them counselling and we will give them support. So they go down a very defined track before they take the decision to separate. We have a very strong support mechanism for them if they are having difficulties.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mrs JAMIESON - I have three or four short, sharp questions. Do you have any evidence of youth offenders who have participated in police supported programs in the community actually joining the police force later on? In other words, they have become enamoured with the idea of joining the police force.

Mr COX - None that I am aware of, and I do not think the commissioner has any knowledge either.

Mrs JAMIESON - No. I just wondered if there was any way of tracking that sort of thing, because there seem to be more police supported programs happening in the community now and it must inspire some young people.

Mr JOHNSTON - There definitely are more supported programs, but I am not aware of anybody coming from them.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do we have a system where we can have police cadets, as we used to have army, navy and air force cadets in schools? Is there such a thing as police cadets?

Mr COX - That is what I did allude to about the -

Mrs JAMIESON - Oh, it was an allusion, that is why I am asking if it was reality.

Mr COX - It is a reality. We have the ones, as I said, who are currently at school but in the police force as juniors.

Mrs JAMIESON - And the number of females we have in the force? Are any of them in higher echelon positions? Have any of them applied for any of the higher jobs?

Mr COX - Some of them are in very high jobs now. The ratios in police and civilian - I will give you police first. I haven't got the numbers; I have a percentage: as at 31 May this year 27.5 per cent of police officers are female - around 300 - and in the civilian sector we have 62.9 per cent females.

Mrs JAMIESON - And those in the higher echelons?

Mr COX - We have 6 per cent of inspectors are females, 9 per cent of sergeants and 30.5 per cent of constables. So 6 per cent of the inspectors are female.

Mrs JAMIESON - What is the policy with maternity leave in view of what is happening at the Commonwealth level as well?

Mr COX - I was going to give you a tongue in cheek answer but I will not do that.

Mr HINE - It is just in accordance with government policy.

Mr COX - Nothing special.

Ms RITCHIE - Just to clarify, I think you mentioned four or four-and-a-half people resigning each month, did you say?

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr COX - No, no.

Mr HINE - It is normally an attrition rate of about four a month and that fluctuates from month to month.

Ms RITCHIE - I am presuming that that attrition rate is natural retirements or are there other elements thrown in there where younger people are saying, 'It is not for me', or are leaving the service because of stress or for those sorts of reasons. Can you give us that information on whether it is predominantly expected retirements or not?

Mr JOHNSTON - It is the whole range of reasons that people leave. We have some people who join us and decide it is not for them and leave. It is interesting that, of those, a lot of them then come back and want to rejoin again because they miss it in a short time. We have the normal retirement regime that people will choose to take. A number of our people leave to go to the Australian Federal Police, unfortunately, because they think that the grass is greener on that side of the fence. But then we have others who leave simply for family reasons.

Ms RITCHIE - How many people per year on average are retiring?

Mr JOHNSTON - In retirement so far in this year we have had 18.

CHAIR - So it is 18 gold watches.

Mr JOHNSTON - These are all people who, having given good and diligent service to the community of Tasmania, have reached the joyous age of 55 or older when they can choose to go.

CHAIR - I hope they received a gold watch.

Ms RITCHIE - I assume on that basis that there is a range of other people leaving for other reasons.

Mr JOHNSTON - Of course.

Mr WING - On the figures that I have of police numbers, in the period since 2000 there has been an increase of about 114, up from 1 131 to 1 245 in the financial year 2005-06. I do not have the figures for the last financial year but I assume they would be approximately the same. I appreciate that there is a limit to the number of officers that any government can afford to employ, even though they would probably have the desire to employ more. With a renewed sense of expectation, I want to ask whether consideration can at this stage be given to introducing a volunteer section of our police force, something that I have been advocating for some years. I would like to know the Government's view on that, and the force's view as well.

Mr COX - Mr Wing, can I firstly say that you got to it sooner than I thought you would. I thought we would have at least had morning tea out of the way before we got around to this one.

Mr WING - I have been very patient.

Laughter.

Mrs JAMIESON - Are you looking for a job after politics?

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr COX - Maybe you may see your future in this, Mr Wing.

Mr WING - I think the President has the option of a uniform before I do.

Mr COX - I will talk to her about that later. You and I have talked about this over many years. You may be aware there is a program called Project Meridian being looked at, and that is how the future of policing is done in Tasmania. Not that it is the same, but you would be aware of one that was known as Project Baton?

Mr WING - Yes, when Mr Madill was minister, I think.

Mr COX - Yes. To quote the commissioner, this is not 'Summit Baton' but we are looking at what the future has and what can be achieved by looking elsewhere. One of the things that the commissioner and I discussed in the last few days was volunteer policing. Neither of us, I think it is fair to say, has our minds closed to it. There is a role where that perhaps could be utilised. It is something that, along with Inspector Mark Mewis, I am going to have a look at in the UK and see if there is an opportunity for us to maybe -

Mr DEAN - You could call into Denver on your way back because they are said to have one of the best volunteer police services in the United States.

Mr COX - There are quite a few but, unfortunately, Mr Dean, I do not have the time to travel. I am aware where they are -

Mr DEAN - There are good skiing fields up at Vail, not far away.

Mr COX - Is that right? No, seriously -

Mr WING - I would be happy to look at them on your behalf.

Mr COX - Yes, I am sure you would. On a serious note, it is something that we have talked about. Neither the commissioner nor I have our minds closed to this, and we will look and see where it can be perhaps implemented. The commissioner may want to add more words to that.

Mr JOHNSTON - No, that's fine.

Mr WING - Perhaps if I could ask for your assessment of the system in Amsterdam that you did visit and the effectiveness of that as you saw it?

Mr COX - It is a loaded question, because you know the answer. You are aware that I was relatively impressed with that.

Mr WING - That is right.

Mr COX - I think, as I have said, that there are opportunities where we may be able to implement similar processes within this State, which is probably a change of attitude from both the commissioner and myself.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr WING - It is a very welcome one and I commend you both for that, because I think there are great benefits. As you know, without going into great detail, in the United Kingdom there were, when I investigated this there about four or five years ago, about 15 000 volunteer police in the various forces in England and they could not do without it. It was something that was totally acceptable to the permanent officers and to the volunteers, but not to the association. The association in the United Kingdom is still not in favour.

Mr COX - That still may be a hurdle that we will get to when it comes to England. We may have to enrol you for some assistance in that area.

Mr JOHNSTON - Mr Wing, I should make one observation because I noticed Mr Hodgman is sitting in the back, and it may be that his other hobbyhorse of a mounted police unit could be achieved through the use of volunteers.

Mr COX - I suspect that he would volunteer actually.

Laughter.

Mr WING - I am delighted to see the open-endedness to that extent too. But as Mr Dean said, and he has discussed this with me, he saw the volunteer system operating in Denver and that is something that would be worth exploring. I hope that I can get there some day and have a look.

Mr JOHNSTON - If I can make one point: The only major issue is the industrial one. The management of these things can be worked through, but the industrial issues are quite significant because we do have a different environment in this country from what exists in the United States or in the United Kingdom. But I noticed that New South Wales are starting to explore this with a lot more enthusiasm now when I spoke to my counterpart there two or three months ago. We are looking at communicating a lot more actively with each other on just this topic.

Mr WING - I went to New South Wales three or four years ago and looked at their system, which was mainly crowd control and nothing like the one in the UK. Minister, as they are changing, I am wondering whether you or the commissioner would have any objection or whether you might be able to facilitate my being able to talk to the force in New South Wales about their current thinking on that, if I can make a visit there?

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes, sure.

Mr COX - I have no problem.

Mr WING - Thank you.

Mr FINCH - Just clarification, Minister, please. You mentioned Project Meridian; I am wondering whether that is specifically a volunteer police force plan?

Mr COX - No, it is not. It is to look at the future of policing in Tasmania. It is how we can best utilise the best practice from other jurisdictions and how we can incorporate them into making the Tasmanian police service even better than it currently is. Is that a fair summary?

Mr FINCH - Thank you.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mrs JAMIESON - I was going ask about Meridian too. Anyway, thank you.

What is going to be the role of Neighbourhood Watch? How is that coming along because there was some diminution in Neighbourhood Watch roles and groups within Tasmania?

Mr COX - I do not know whether this goes to the core of what you are asking, Mrs Jamieson, but from between 1 July 2007 and 31 March 2008 the Government sponsored Neighbourhood Watch to the tune of \$15 000. That was for a 12 month Neighbourhood Watch television promotional campaign to be run on WIN. There are 54 urban Neighbourhood Watches active and 19 rural.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is there a role for them to be expanded? They were originally voluntary.

Mr JOHNSTON - Mrs Jamieson, the first comment I make is Tasmania Police have engaged with Neighbourhood Watch for some years now in what we call Project Samaritan where we have attempted to use them to provide security advice to local householders who are either the victims of a home burglary or who feel at risk. We trained a number of Neighbourhood Watch volunteers to provide that sort of advice to homeowners.

I can indicate to you that it is always a concern to us because Neighbourhood Watch flourishes at a time of high crime and its engagement diminishes at a time of low crime and of course whilst I am really pleased to be able to trumpet the fact that our crime statistics are down significantly that has the effect of having a negative influence on the growth of Neighbourhood Watch areas.

One of the strategies that they are presently looking at that I think has great potential is that they are in negotiations with a company called Data Dot. The minister and I had the opportunity to see some of this technology recently. Historically Neighbourhood Watch would come to your house if you asked them and they would engrave on the back of your VCR your driver's licence number and some people used to get concerned that their goods had been totally destroyed by the use of this engraving device. I suppose that made them less attractive to thieves as well so there was probably an upside to that. But with this Data Dot technology it is simply a case of either spraying on or wiping on to valuable pieces of equipment or jewellery or even paper for that matter these tiny little dots that are not normally visible to the naked eye when they are sprayed on. They are used in expensive motor cars like BMWs; they spray data dots right through their vehicles at the time of manufacture so that if even the battery is stolen out of it you will be able to identify the car from which it has been stolen because of the data dots that are attached to it. So our hope is that Neighbourhood Watch and the owners of this technology can come to a deal whereby Neighbourhood Watchers can come to the community and offer to deliver this service to secure their items and create a register. That register would be maintained by the police service so that in the event of property stolen it would be much more readily identifiable.

Mrs JAMIESON - What costs are involved in that?

Mr JOHNSTON - That is what is being negotiated right now.

Mr COX - We understand it is not a massive cost.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would the police department find the extra dollars to -

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr COX - Be careful, Commissioner.

Laughter.

CHAIR - Can the minister find the extra?

Mr COX - The minister is talking to Government and looking at it maybe for documentation. Can I expand a little on what the commissioner said?

To give members an idea: the dot itself is smaller than the head of a pin; it is like a fly spot. It cannot be removed and it can be photocopied and they did one as an example for me and it had my name on it around 90 times, so it is just a wonderful piece of technology.

Mr WING - Rattray-Wagner would be with fewer numbers.

CHAIR - Forty-five times. Obviously you support that.

Mr COX - I think it is a wonderful innovation.

CHAIR - So it would be an initiative you would take on as a minister?

Mr COX - It is one I will totally support. I am very impressed by it. I have raised it with the Premier's department to see if we can use it for documentation.

CHAIR - I would suggest the Treasurer would be the next place to go.

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, this is a proprietary technology so we would not want to talk up our enthusiasm too much because the providers of it will then increase the price accordingly.

Mr COX - So we are not that interested really.

Laughter.

Mr COX - It is like buying a used car, isn't it?

Mrs JAMIESON - I am just wondering how much promotion has been done through Neighbourhood Watch then about the system.

Mr JOHNSTON - This is very early days.

Mr COX - Brand new technology.

Mr JOHNSTON - They have only just started talking to each other, Data Dot and Neighbourhood Watch, within the last six weeks.

Mrs JAMIESON - Thank you.

Mr COX - The Commissioner and I went to a conference in Sydney and it was part of the display that was shown to us to enthuse us and in our case it worked.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr DEAN - The next area I want to get to is the skills forest police, the new group that is being set up for protests and so on. I will raise the issue in relation to horses and that is why we are blessed with Her Majesty's shadow attorney-general here now.

Mr COX - Has he made an application, Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - I ask this question on behalf of our shadow attorney-general and hopefully you will allow me to do this.

CHAIR - Absolutely.

Mr DEAN - We have a new commissioner of police here and he is looking at new strategies and new positions and that is good, moving the police service forward and I congratulate him on all that. Would the commissioner now or the minister look at a mounted police unit to operate in this State?

We know the ceremonial purposes of mounted police but also we know the use that mounted police could serve in the area of forestry protest and there are other uses of mounted police around the country. We have the ground available at the Rokeby Academy so the costs there would be cut tremendously. The horses would be donated. There could be a form of volunteer involved in this type of policing as well, so I think it does have a lot of pluses.

I think the cost would be reasonably minimal in all the circumstances. Will you seriously consider that, Minister, moving forward and because of this new police skills group we are looking at, for protest action and so on, I think it would be two coming together.

Ms RITCHIE - They are mounted but they are just mounted on bikes.

Mr DEAN - No, I am not talking about mounted police, we are talking about horses, not on bikes.

Ms RITCHIE - Yes, the police are already mounted - on bikes.

Mr COX - I think, Mr Dean, the commissioner did indicate to you that it was something he may look at using volunteers. As far as actually putting together a special mounted police corps, I am not too sure whether the commissioner has given his mind to that.

Mr JOHNSTON - Mr Dean, you indicated there is a changing environment out there and I am not only talking about within the police service, of course, I am talking about externally. We all know the value of horses when it comes to crowd control and management of events. I have had, with the former commissioner, a reluctance to engage with the mounted policing unit simply because of cost. They would have been ceremonial 99 per cent of the time and we did not see that that was a good use of the funds that the taxpayer gives to us. With the options of volunteer policing on the table and with the fact we have a range of police officers in the organisation who are significant equestrian -

Mr DEAN - We now have a dog squad that I advocated for when I went through Airlie Police College. I might add that it was a paper I did.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr COX - See what it took? It took a new minister and a new commissioner, there you go.

Mr JOHNSTON - I make the simple observation that nothing is off the table and I am more than happy for it to be part of the consideration that we are looking at across the whole of the future of the policing service.

Mr COX - Can I suggest, Mr Dean, if we do a ceremonial one, Mr Hodgman will want to be up the front.

Mr DEAN - Just continuing on with that same line - how many will be in the new group that is being set up?

[10.30 a.m.]

CHAIR - I know it is only early but I am prepared to put the timer on; we have to keep questions and answers short and sharp.

Mr JOHNSTON - We cannot tell you numbers. It is really broad. We are training lots. It is called the Public Order Management Team and we are upskilling a whole raft of different people. It is not a permanent presence; these are people who are doing other duties who will be brought together, should the need arise, to tackle issues of protestors locking themselves onto devices or being up trees and not coming down.

CHAIR - The cost of the course?

Mr JOHNSTON - The cost is totally absorbed. I am not sure what the actual costs are. But the reality is that it is about making sure that our police officers can do this in a much safer way than they have been able to do it before, that they are trained to do it to meet the specific problems they confront.

Mr DEAN - Will there be a number of officers around the State specifically trained in this area?

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes, they already have been trained and they are around the State.

Mr COX - So they are not stuck in Devonport or Hobart, which is what you were alluding to.

Mr DEAN - That is a concern. We just want to know that they are there and that they will be available because with protest action, sometimes you do not get a lot of warning and sometimes you do. The pulp mill was raised yesterday and we understand there could be some action there. So, obviously, we need to be prepared and it is well done.

Mrs JAMIESON - My question follows on from that. Just looking at the Auditor-General's Report. He is suggesting here that budget paper major issues and initiatives should be for the continued enhancement of previously provided services rather than for new programs or projects. Would you care to comment? That was reporting against initiatives in the Auditor's report that came up. Further to that was, just how many police are specifically trained in youth issues, for example, and actively involved in youth specific issues?

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

CHAIR - Do we want to go back and answer the first one, comment on the Auditor-General's recommendations?

Mr JOHNSTON - I understand the question. I do apologise for being a little obtuse. Tasmania Police, as you know, keeps, maintains, collates and uses so much data and I am happy to share with you one of our monthly reports on all the operational data that we do collate. What the Auditor-General was saying was that he wants us to have a look at rejigging some of the data that we collect to better focus it in relation to road safety as opposed to the number of specific items and activities. We are presently going through all of that. We have done as much of it as we can for now but we are continuing to do it as part of an ongoing program with our corporate reporting services.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you were generally happy with the comments made by the Auditor?

Mr JOHNSTON - I tried yesterday to make the point that we welcome the Auditor-General coming into our organisation because it is through that process that we can get better and the Auditor-General has made a lot of recommendations in a number of reports that we have been able to engage with that will make the police service a more responsive and a more efficient organisation. So I am not at all troubled when he comes in and makes reports. If you have a look at them, nearly all of them indicate, 12 months later, when he comes back to do a test of what we have done about his recommendations, he gives us a glowing report on acting on the recommendations that he has made.

Mrs JAMIESON - The other part of the question was, are there police who are specifically trained in youth issues and reoffenders and are they located everywhere around the State?

Mr COX - Yes there is. Each police district has an early intervention and youth action unit and that assesses all juvenile violence. So the answer is yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - Located around the State?

Mr COX - Yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - Can we have indication of how many?

Mr COX - Yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - That is a police unit?

Mr COX - No, each police district has them. An indication of how many have been in contact?

Mrs JAMIESON - Just how many are involved?

Mr COX - Juveniles or officers?

Mrs JAMIESON - Officers.

Mr COX - About 12.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you feel that is sufficient to help with this because we seem to have so many youth offending each year?

Mr HINE - We have increased the numbers. Over the years we have seen a steady increase in the number of youth that we deal with, so we have steadily increased the numbers and in fact about 18 months ago we formed a new unit in each district as part of the district response division and the youth action team. We set up a specific unit in each district and then we got the PCYCs full-time police officers there so our investment in dealing with youth has been increasing over the last 10 years from diversionary practices to now where we have a full-time unit with a sergeant in charge of those units dealing specifically with those issues.

CHAIR - I am sure we will have an opportunity to come back to that in output group 6.

Mr DEAN - Just following on from the member for Mersey's question on the statistical side. Do we have the numbers of police that are involved and in headquarters in Hobart in particular are involved permanently in the gathering of statistical data and the dissemination of statistical data that is collated within the police service and are there police officers involved in that?

Mr JOHNSTON - There is one police officer.

Mr DEAN - State service staff?

Mr JOHNSTON - With two support staff.

Mr DEAN - Two support staff and that is their responsibility.

Mr JOHNSTON - In addition to that of course we have the departmental statistician whose role and responsibility is different from what I think you are talking about.

Mr HINE - If I can expand on that, we have a system now where these statistics are gathered more and more electronically so the actual human intervention to take away resources to do that is becoming less and less. That is our preferred model. Obviously, at the other end you have to have some people to put it together but the electronic availability of statistics takes away that additional human intervention.

Mr DEAN - It is good to hear that but I am not opposed to having people working there. You need accessible data to determine what you are doing and where you are going, so I do not criticise that at all.

The other matter that I just wanted to briefly touch on was - and other members will have questions on it - the Safe at Home legislation -

CHAIR - That is output 6, Mr Dean. If we can keep to our output groups that is probably more helpful.

Mr DEAN - Yes. Overtime within the police service, what is the position there? Is overtime increasing throughout the service or are we on top of that or does it necessitate police working extended hours and any impact that might be having? I am talking straight-out overtime - recall to work - and then court recalls is the other one I wanted as well and that probably comes into judicial services and so on, I accept that, but it comes into this area as well.

Mr JOHNSTON - We do not have the figures with us. If I could just make a general observation, the amount of money that we spend on overtime is not growing other than in line with increased budget costs with salary costs so I do not have a sense that there is an increased issue there because I look at it from the point of view of the finances. From the point of view of the court, we have had a couple of programs in recent times to try to better manage attendance of police at courts because, as you would be aware, quite often police officers attend at court only to find that they are not required and that intrudes on their days off and their downtime on shifts and impacts on their annual leave. We have had a couple of projects to try to reduce that so my expectation would be that those number of hours have reduced and I know they had last year but I am not aware as to whether they are still down this year. I will provide that material.

Mr DEAN - Is it possible to table that at a later stage then?

Mr COX - Yes, we will get it for you.

Ms RITCHIE - I want to go back to the PCYCs of which I am a very big supporter. I wonder, Minister, if you or your officers can let us know whether demographic change is affecting the way that police are looking at their location and the operations of their PCYCs? We have seen shifts in where the young people are and, for example, the one in my electorate at Bellerive I know is catering for a lot of senior activities rather than youth activities because the young people just are not there any more. They have moved and they are in other suburbs further afield, so I wonder how that is affecting the ongoing operations of the PCYCs.

Mr COX - The answer is yes. Police are having a much more detailed involvement in it. The commissioner, perhaps, might like to give some detail of it.

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes thank you, Minister. Quite simply, we do regularly review the programs and services that are being delivered through PCYCs to make sure that they are relevant. As you would be aware, the Government has committed funding to the Huonville PCYC build and development. We are expecting some significant pressure for one at Glenorchy and I am sure that we will address that when it comes. But the point that I would like to make is that, in looking at the service delivery, what the PCYCs came up with that is most relevant is that police activity centres, the mobile activity centres, being able to take their services to the communities that need them as opposed to expecting the communities to come to a fixed building site. I am very pleased to say that these are hugely popular in areas like Primrose Sands, for argument's sake, where I -

CHAIR - Woodsdale recently; at the family day there.

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes, Woodsdale. This is a great way of getting out and engaging with particularly smaller communities, without having to go to the cost of getting the building infrastructure for -

Ms RITCHIE - or partnerships with DOE, for example.

Mr JOHNSTON - We are in partnerships with a whole raft of players. Sport and Rec is a really keen partner with police in the youth club environment, as is the Department of Education. Local government are just as keen as anything to have the mobile activity centres go to their area and help them in setting up.

Mr FINCH - Just continuing on with that. Just conferring with the member for Windermere, who of course has Ravenswood and surrounding areas in his electorate. There have been some issues in the community there. When you mentioned to Ms Ritchie in respect of some new PCYCs going in at Kingston and another area, I am just exercising my mind there; we do have the PCYC, a very strong one, in the city or close, at Newstead in Launceston, but I am wondering whether an add-on, maybe a smaller operation in somewhere like Ravenswood might go some way towards helping to engage young members of our community with their community and with their police.

Mr DEAN - The one we have is set up in one of the most affluent and best areas of Launceston.

CHAIR - That is your area, is it? Do you live there?

Mr DEAN - I think if it were to be set up now you would probably look at the northern suburbs.

Mr COX - I am not opposed to the comments that you make. I am certainly well aware of where it is. I have seen it develop and flourish over the years. In fact my memory goes back to when it used to be at Invermay.

Mr WING - Yes, until a fire destroyed the building.

Mr COX - Correct; out near Aurora Stadium, actually, if Mr Wing's memory is similar to mine.

Mr WING - Near the Invermay bowls club; somewhere in that vicinity.

Mr COX - Somewhere down there; that is absolutely correct.

Can I just take the members' comments on board; we could have a look at that. It is obviously not something I am prepared to commit to right now, and I am sure the commissioner would not want to either but I take your point and I am happy to have a look at it.

Mr FINCH - Another point I make, Minister, is that with it being located so far away from those particular suburbs where it may be most needed is that a lot of activities go on in the evening and after school. How are the young people and the children from that area going to get to it if the bus service has been halted or buses do not run -

Mr COX - The bus run has been reinstated.

Mr FINCH - or if buses do not run in the evening?

Mr HINES - They have the PCYC in Launceston and they do have two buses that I have seen up there on my recent visit to the Launceston PCYC. They have this program where they take a bus around to pick kids up and it brings them to there, so they are quite active in that area.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

When it was built it was probably the right area at the time. Obviously things move on, but they are certainly aware of that. They have just purchased a new bus to deliver some of those services out into the areas and also to bring people back into the areas and to the PCYC as well.

Mr COX - What we might do, Mr Finch, is have a look at it. As the deputy commissioner rightly points out, there is a bus service there. Maybe with the new youth worker that is going to be put on up there we can find some way of making it more available and making it better know that the bus is about. I am happy to try to work with you on that.

Mr DEAN - I think it is important that we get the youth worker there working on this because, unfortunately, the kids that we are targeting want to go when they feel like it and they want to come back when they feel like it. They will not use the bus service and they keep saying that, so whilst it is a good program, that is the situation.

Mr COX - We may have to find out when they do want to go and how we can work. We both know exactly what the problem is.

CHAIR - Minister, it has been a very productive session. I would like to break for morning tea and return to the table at 11 a.m. with Mr Wing to kick off.

The committee suspended from 10.45 a.m. to 11.00 a.m.

Mr WING - I have just been telling the commissioner I was impressed on Sunday evening when coming to Hobart to see a marked police vehicle with an officer booking a driver who had overtaken me at quite high speeds some kilometres back. One of my colleagues said he had seen four marked police vehicles on the Midland Highway that evening, which I find very impressive. I think that is an important factor in deterring people from committing road offences and therefore it is in the interest of road safety. I was wondering whether there had been a new policy. I would welcome having more marked vehicles on the road.

Mr COX - The short answer to that is yes and I thank you for making that observation because I had a discussion with somebody in another place yesterday who maintained that he had never seen them and they were never there. I travel that highway a great deal as do you and I have seen those same officers either moving around or pulling people over. There are probably some others that you did not see as they may not be as clearly marked.

Mr WING - Unmarked vehicles?

Mr COX - Yes.

Mr WING - I think the marked vehicles have much more effect -

Mr COX - ,Absolutely, but it is a combination.

Mr WING - I have not seen so many in the past but I thought it might be a new policy or a new trend.

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Mr COX - The deputy commissioner is champing at the bit. I reckon he would like to enlarge a bit on that.

Mr HINE - There is an overall strategy from the traffic secretary's point of view from the department so we collate all districts together and we have introduced in the last 12 months what we call a statewide lockdown so we will lock down the State. We have had 10 of those so far this financial year where if you drive from Hobart to Burnie you will come across an RBT site or a speed detection site somewhere. They have been quite successful.

Mr WING - So that is a speed camera.

Mr HINE - Speeding, RBTs, inattentive driving, and we increase our presence on long weekends, Easter, Christmas and various cups around the place. It is very much coordinated across all districts so if you are going to travel the major roads you will come across a police presence. Also we have combined the various uniform stations along the highways as well to include those in the areas. So there has been more coordination of our traffic policy statewide as opposed to just the districts.

Mr WING - That is good to hear.

The visible presence of marked police vehicles on the road is an even greater deterrent than speed cameras that are hidden, although they both have their role.

Mr HINE - That is one of the strategies in MUARC - the Monash University Accident Reduction Centre. They sit on the road safety task force and they give us advice. One of the best deterrents for us is the thought that people are going to get caught.

Mr WING - That is right.

Mr HINE - There is a role for unmarked police vehicles in that as well and there is certainly a role for marked police vehicles and the visible presence. You have to combine those things. In New Zealand they had very overt speed cameras but they found the strategy was not working for them so they went back to covert speed cameras. In some States, as we know, they have gone to wheelie bins, letter boxes and all those sorts of things but we certainly have not gone to that extent. There are various studies around to show the effect of the different overt and covert methods. Our top speed camera location for detection is the Tasman Bridge and I would imagine the survey results as to who knows it is on the Tasman Bridge would be very, very high. It is sign posted, everyone knows it is there but that is our top site that we get and you could not get a more better advertised speed camera location than that.

Mr COX - I apologise for not handing out earlier this business plan for 2008-09. It is interesting in light of what you are saying. One of the comments made in here is that in 2008-09 we will deliver high visibility and targeted policing activities to increase the deterrents and detection of driver offending behaviour. So there you go; you have only just mentioned it and it is already in there.

Mr WING - Right.

As a part of that strategy has any consideration been given to having a separate traffic section in the police force? There used to be but I understand -

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Mr JOHNSTON - We still have traffic policing. I think what you might be referring to is that there used to be dedicated highway patrol people who saw that as their only function in life. Our current policy in relation to that is simple. All police officers are police officers and they need to be able to do the total range of policing services and tasks.

CHAIR - I would suggest that could be an area for volunteers.

Mrs JAMIESON - I will take it if there is a job for me.

Mr JOHNSTON - Thank you.

Laughter.

Mr COX - That was the right answer, Commissioner.

Mr WING - I discussed with the commissioner the question of hooning around the streets and erratic behaviour - not just hooning but accelerating and making undue noise - and the lack of perceived police numbers to cope with those matters. I raise this matter here so that there can be some response to that, because it seems to me that in Launceston in mid-evening, for example, there is no obvious visible presence of police so people conduct hooning at many times of the day feeling fairly safe from any risk of prosecution.

Mr COX - There certainly has been activity in that area, Mr Wing. Perhaps, with respect, we could deal with that in some more detail when we get to output group 3. I am not trying to get away from it.

CHAIR - Minister, you can see how enthusiastic this committee is.

Mr COX - I have never doubted that.

Mr WING - Sorry, that is under road safety, is it?

Mr COX - Yes, output group 3.

Mr WING - I wasn't thinking of it just in terms of road safety.

Ms RITCHIE - One of the things I noticed in this year's Budget which I am very impressed with is the approach to technology. We have Health investing a lot of research money in technology. Please update the committee on what the police service has done or is doing in relation to technology and the improvement of delivery of policing services.

Mr COX - I thank you for that because it is a very important area and we did touch on it a moment ago in another area. Police and Emergency Management certainly are continuing to invest in technology to support and enable the efficient and effective delivery of policing and emergency management to the Tasmanian community. During the previous financial year, Telstra completed the installation and configuration of a wireless gateway used by Tasmania Police. This infrastructure gives the ability to provide simple, secure and reliable access to police IT systems, wirelessly by the Next G network from mobile devices.

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The functionality has been used successfully at a number of large-scale events including the Falls Festival and, unfortunately, the Myer fire. The wireless technology is being used in - and this is the one we touched on with Mr Dean - the automatic vehicle location, the AVL, project to examine the feasibility of delivering global positioning satellite mobile vehicles.

The department also made a significant investment in upgrading the network infrastructure in the previous 12 months and, during this period, the following upgrades occurred. There have been 44 police facilities throughout the State, predominantly small police stations, that have been upgraded from a basic 56KB dial-up services to 512/128K ADSL services. Mr Dean would agree it has been a long time coming also.

The Police Academy has been upgraded - I do not have all the figures - but it has been upgraded. Burnie District Headquarters has been upgraded, as has Glenorchy Divisional Headquarters and the SES facility of Youngtown has been upgraded from a basic service to a 512/128K ADSL service.

In the past five years, the department's fleet of PCs has increased by in excess of 18 per cent from 1 817 in 2004 to the current fleet of 966. The RECAM project has seen the implementation of the TRIM context electronic document and records management system within the Department of Police and Emergency Management throughout Tasmania. That has allowed the 160 users throughout the State to accessed corporate information electronically, as and when required. The court file tracking project is currently being implemented in order to streamline the manner in which we manage prosecution file movements and Project Meridian, which we talked about, has been recently established within the department to investigate the broad range of technologies that are available to police.

I thank the member for asking that because it is something that very important, it is ongoing and it is something that the police have embraced.

Ms RITCHIE - Presumably, as some of these developments continue to roll out, particularly the ones in their infancy, you will be able to report back in terms of their efficiencies in years to come. Is that the intention with these things?

Mr COX - Definitely.

Ms RITCHIE - Thank you.

Mr COX - No, I thank you for the question.

Mr FINCH - It is interesting how, in this circumstance, you can go back over history and recall some of the things that have occurred in the past. In talking about technology, I remember the debate that we had about mandatory carriage of licence, and I remember some evidence given by the current commissioner - before your time, Minister -

Mr COX - No, I was the one who introduced it.

Mr FINCH - Right, okay, it was too. The argument that was presented to me that came through strongly was that it was a method to catch people who were not licensed and to assist with insurance circumstances.

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[11.15 a.m.]

Mr COX - A combination of reasons, yes.

Mr FINCH - I think the argument that I put forward during that debate - and I might say I was the only one who spoke against that legislation - that I thought there should have been technology made available to police to punch in a person's and get all their drivers licence and identification details. The assurance from the commissioner was that that technology was some five years away and this could be seen as an interim measure. Is that facility available now to police officers?

Mr JOHNSTON - How many years did I reckon it was away?

Mr FINCH - Five years.

Mr JOHNSTON - How long ago was that?

Mr FINCH - About three years ago.

Mr JOHNSTON - I think it was around four years ago.

Mr COX - It was four going on five.

Mr FINCH - Next year?

Mr JOHNSTON - The minister was about to tell you they have just started to introduce that technology in Queensland.

Mr FINCH - And in Tasmania?

Mr COX - Before the commissioner tells you the story, and there probably will be a story, there is technology that is being used in different things. Stepping away from that one for a moment, this comes back to what I was saying to Ms Ritchie a minute ago. Technology is changing all the time. From my previous role with DIER I am aware of a system to check truck logbooks. Members would be know that log books in trucks are not always exactly the most truthful things and quite a few operators have two log books, or so it has been suggested. There is now a system whereby with a swipe card all the information that they have is now available so an inspector can stop and conduct a random test. The information is held in a very small black box that goes in the truck. The reason I tell that is because it is emerging technology, it is just ongoing. Now the system that you are alluding to is currently in Queensland. My information on that - and the commissioner may correct me - is that it is not that successful. There are some problems with it.

Mr JOHNSTON - The first comment I make is that it is unfortunate that we live in a federation sometimes, because some jurisdictions do things on their own when it would be far better for us to have exactly the same systems throughout the country. One of the big deficiencies of our using the Queensland system is that in Tasmania we do not have the means of reading the technology that they are implementing. A Queensland driver can come down here and we would have trouble reading the information stored on the licence. At one stage they were not going to put any information on the driver's licence, it was all going to be on the barcode or on the metallic strip. Unfortunately if someone came here we would not be able to identify even whether it was a

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current driver's licence or not. We are going through some protocols with Queensland to try to work through the difficulties that that causes.

Mr FINCH - At that time I told a factual story about a chap in my electorate who took a tractor out of one paddock and into another paddock. A police car behind him was able to punch in the registration number of the tractor and book him for being on the road on an unregistered tractor.

Mr JOHNSTON - The convergence of technologies now is fast going towards the use of greater biometrics and I do not think there is any doubt that in four years from now we will be sitting here talking about people simply needing to put their fingerprint onto a scanner and that will tell whoever is reading it the information that they are entitled to read about that person, be it a driver's licence, criminal history, the existence of warrants to arrest them, et cetera. That is where the technology is clearly heading.

Mr COX - The technology has changed. At the moment, as you would be aware, the whole process has changed as to how we get our licence, where we do it and what is on it. That is a process that is about to come on line, I think.

Mr DEAN - I want to raise the Ravenswood situation again, Minister. I think it is an appropriate time to raise it. We have requested that the police station in Ravenswood be opened full time, or at least opened from early morning to late at night to help control the current problems in that area. Minister, I guess it comes down to resources. I know the police there are working well and they have put on extra police to control this area. I understand all of that and I admire what they are doing there. However, the public are saying the station needs to be open and they need to have a police presence there throughout the day and particularly in the evening. Would you give consideration to providing the support that is necessary for the police to provide a full-time presence there in the foreseeable future?

Mr COX - Mr Dean, I can remember probably in the early 1990s when this problem was exactly as it is today. This has been an ongoing issue for the people of Ravenswood probably for 15 years or longer, I suspect. In fact, I would probably go back to about 1989, believe it or not. At the time, there was a call for exactly the same thing and I am sure that you would remember it, Paul. My recollection is that it has been tried at different times and in different way. The best outcome that I have seen is that there is a police presence in the community and not so much in the station. That station is still operational, I understand that. I am not convinced that having someone sitting behind a desk, for 12 hours or whatever, is the best outcome for that.

Mr DEAN - Minister, while I spoke of the police station being open, the public want a permanent police presence in Ravenswood. Currently the police cannot do that. That is what I mean.

Mr COX - Sorry, I thought you were going for a 24 hour, let us open the door.

Mr DEAN - No, it is not someone being in the police station, but somebody in the Ravenswood area while we have this current difficulty again, that we have full-time presence there. The current police are trying to do that but they just do not have the capacity.

Mr COX - They are and I agree with you, they have been terrific there. The commander in the area has been excellent. There has a greater police presence there. My understanding - and I

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refer this to the commissioner - is that there has been a greater police presence there. They are maintaining that and the good thing is, they are only a matter of moments away anyway, as you are aware. The commissioner might want to add a bit to side.

Mr JOHNSTON - There really is very little to add. My understanding is that three police officers attached to Ravenswood are still attached to Ravenswood. The permanent numbers are there. They are being supplemented, as you have indicated, by people out of Launceston who go up there on regular patrols and the people who work from that station do their paperwork and their other processes within the station. The lights are on, the door is open and the open sign is up. They are in there doing that when that is what they have to do. Whilst the minister and I have not talked about it, but I am sure you would agree, it is a much more effective use of the resources if they are highly visible, diving, walking, pushbikes around the community, than it is having one sitting behind a desk waiting for a call.

Mr DEAN - I think if we can get that this problem will be cut short. We do not want to see it build up because the longer it goes on, the greater the number involved and the greater the problem becomes. Unfortunately, these kids know exactly where the police are. We have spoken to them. They all have mobile phones. They know exactly where the police are all the time.

Mr COX - A friend of mine works for the City Mission. He was up there the other day cooking for a barbecue and they waited until the police went past and then they stepped back out. They were using a sling-shot type of effect. He had good sense so he went over and spoke to them and they spoke fairly unkindly to him. His comment to me was, 'You should never be rude to a gentleman who has a big knife in his hand.' So he cut the sling-shot. I think that may have deterred them somewhat. But the point being, they are aware of where the police are and there are two or three who create a problem for the rest.

Mr JOHNSTON - I want to add one final comment. I think everybody is aware that we the public order response teams now have 10 police officers working as a unit. They are being deployed as a unit, high visibility, high profile, large number present, the old shock and awe tactic, I understand the acting commander is keen on deploying at Ravenswood as well.

Mr COX - A point of explanation. The gentleman who cut the sling-shot was working at a barbecue and had been cutting some meat up; he was not carrying the knife. I just wanted to put that on the record.

CHAIR - I can see that the commissioner feels much more relaxed about your clarifying that.

Mr WING - Is there not some advantage in having police officers living in the areas that are likely to cause concern? I remember when a police officer used to be in the Mayfield area. Living there, the officer gained knowledge of who was doing what and had his finger on the pulse. That in itself helped with investigations and acted as a deterrent. Is there any likelihood of a review of the policy where it not necessary to have officers living in areas such as that?

Mr COX - I know that certainly works very well in country towns and country communities, but I think that is more appropriate for the commissioner to comment on.

Mr JOHNSTON - The review that you are talking about, Mr Wing, is happening but from a different perspective. We do have police officers who live in what we call '\$5 houses' and they are in locations such as Ravenswood, Gagebrook, Rokeby and so on where the housing

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commission make available houses at very cheap rent for police officers. A condition of the cheap rent is that they become part of the community in which those houses are located. That is happening and I am 99 per cent confident that the ones at Ravenswood are occupied by police officers.

Mr HINE - The housing area is going to undertake a review of the effectiveness through TILES - the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies - so they are going to review the effectiveness of the program.

Mr WING - That is very good - welcome news.

Ms RITCHIE - You commented earlier that we have 25.7 per cent of female police officers. How does that compare with other States? I am happy for you to take it on notice. I wondered what the percentages are for other States and how Tasmania fares in comparison.

Mr COX - I think we punch above our weight in that area, Ms Ritchie. I am fairly confident we are almost at the top of the scale. I cannot give you the exact figure but I am sure the Deputy Commissioner can. I think that out of the States and Territories we are up at the top, if not the top.

Mr WING - We are doing the same in the Legislative Council.

Mr COX - I have noticed that, Mr Wing.

Ms RITCHIE - We are equal top in Australia for female representation in the Legislative Council.

Mr COX - We will give you the figures out of session.

Mrs JAMIESON - I would like an update on Crime Stoppers, the usage, efficacy et cetera. Is the general public using it efficiently?

Mr JOHNSTON - As you probably know, the deputy commissioner and I sit on the board of Crime Stoppers. The front page of today's *Advocate* would give you some indication of the success of Crime Stoppers. I think page 3 of today's *Examiner* also ran a very prominent story on the success of Crime Stoppers. We are very pleased with the way Crime Stoppers is operating. It has very strong corporate support and a good funding base to pay for the rewards that people claim. It is also very interesting to note that a vast majority of those who provide information do not seek a reward. They are sufficiently public spirited to want to give the information alone. It cleans up a lot of crime. There are some specific numbers -

Mrs JAMIESON - You could table them, if you like.

Mr WING - Are they obliged to be prepared to give evidence?

Mr JOHNSTON - No.

Mrs JAMIESON - I was wondering about the actual usage and an indication maybe of the type of crime -

Mr COX - I can give you those.

Mrs JAMIESON - Okay, and the type of crimes that people report.

Mr COX - The number of calls received with the code numbers allocated was 2 276. There were 191 people charged. The 191 people charged were also charged with a total of 500 offences so more than one crime was committed by one person. The property that was recovered was \$31 880. There were drugs involved in that also, quite a considerable amount - over \$1 million worth. The rewards paid were very low. Not many people asked for it. It was around \$2 775. So the system works.

[11.30 a.m.]

CHAIR - Minister, I want to pursue the line about the Healthy and Active Program that the Government strongly supports hence the \$3.3 million that has been allocated to the public sector. If there is such a focus on health and activities why would the Police department not support the cycling race that has travelled, since 1972, from Launceston to Hobart? We are talking about a healthy community and yet we are not following by lead, I would suggest.

Mr COX - Can I clearly put on the record that I have some real concerns with this. I have been a great supporter of that event. You are talking about the H.G. Westbrook event?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr COX - The Westbrook race, Launceston, has been running for over 100 years. It is operated by a gentleman who I would call a friend of mine and I have very close involvement.

CHAIR - And you could not give him a permit?

Mr JOHNSTON - It proves that the minister does not interfere in operational matters.

Mr COX - I definitely do not and certainly my integrity would not allow me to say to the commissioner, 'I would ask you to do this'.

The difficulty over the last few years is that that particular event has struggled to get approval and the gentleman concerned has been advised, I think at least last year and maybe the year before, that this was going to be the last time. He scraped home last year because he was probably fortunate that there had been a change of personnel in one particular area and they nearly ran out of time to issue the permit. Rather than create the difficulty because he was not aware that it was not going to be approved, the police, as a show of goodwill and good faith, allowed it to run but did advise him that that would be the last time.

I spoke to the commissioner about this and whilst I am saddened by the decision, I accept it and I accept it for the reasons. It is a safety issue and I probably am now going to pass it over to the commissioner because, as I said, I am fairly close to this but I accept the reasons.

CHAIR - But it does not support the Government's policy.

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, can I interrupt. It is unfortunate that sometimes decisions have to be made where there are competing priorities. In this particular matter the risk assessment was done. There are very clear guidelines for the conduct of cycle races. Our guidelines are

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modelled on those from other jurisdictions where all the same issues have been raised and, quite simply, I will not be the Commissioner for Police in this State where a major collision occurs involving motorists and cyclists if our risk assessment shows that that is a high probability.

CHAIR - Why would the department support Targa?

Mr JOHNSTON - Going back to the point about physical activity, we have shown in a whole raft of other ways that we support physical activity, but this simply comes down to the fact that you cannot let emotion override your responsibilities when it comes to things like the risk to the road users and other members of the community. The assessment was done by very well qualified commanders of police. They were reviewed by an assistant commissioner or an acting assistant commissioner, as it is this year, and everybody has come to the same conclusion that it would be great to let it happen. We have tried to sit down with the gentleman concerned to try to find a way that we can do it and do it safety and that just could not be found.

Mr COX - The fact that it is a national highway and a 110 kilometre-an-hour zone is the problem.

Mr WING - Does that mean that there will not be any more cycling road races in Tasmania on main roads?

Mr JOHNSTON - No.

Mr COX - No.

Mr WING - What is the difference between this and, say, Tour of the North?

Mr JOHNSTON - There is a whole raft of different issues around it. The first is, as the minister says, the open highway issue. It is about the level of support that can be given to it. Most of the bike races to which you refer are operated more in a pack, whereas this particular cycle race has all the cyclists spread out over many kilometres but not this year, I notice, as that was one concession the organiser was prepared to make but in previous years it has gone on and off the highway into places such as Ross and Oatlands and of course coming back onto the highway always causes difficulties and it is a very high-risk activity.

It is for those sorts of reasons. Things like the race at Richmond will not be interfered with and it is fine but it depends on how they conduct the race, what the risk assessment is and to ensure they meet the guidelines that are now in place and everybody is aware of them. The guidelines were developed in conjunction with the cycling authorities and various cycling groups around the State and everyone seems to be happy with the guidelines except for this one event.

Mr WING - I am interested in it because I have been supporting it for many years.

Mrs JAMIESON - There is no way this particular event could be modified?

Mr COX - It would then not be what it is.

Mrs JAMIESON - Yes, I appreciate that.

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Mr COX - You and I both have a great interest in the cycling fraternity. A lot of the races that you are talking about are now being held on secondary roads and that is the problem. I have an emotive issue but also somebody said to me, 'If you interfere in this, will you take responsibility for it?' and the answer is 'no'. I put the same question to Madam Chair - 'We will do it, will you be responsible?'

CHAIR - Obviously it is a valid question.

Mr COX - Exactly and that is the problem.

CHAIR - When you talk about safety aspects of Targa - and we are trying to reduce speed on roads - and then you look at something like this from a person who does not have the knowledge that you have, it would appear that people are not treated the same.

Mr COX - Sure. Totally.

Mr JOHNSTON - I understand that but I suppose the one comment about Targa and whether or not there are other issues around that is a moot point but the actual racing bits happen on closed roads.

Mr COX - The roads are shut down.

Mr JOHNSTON - The people at risk are those in the car and nobody else, except maybe spectators and that is the subject of a different risk assessment. With bike races it is a whole raft of things and quite seriously, reduce it to its lowest common denominator - if you come up behind bicycles travelling at 30 kilometres an hour on the open highway at a place where you are not able to overtake, frustration levels get high, people start to overtake when it is not safe to do so, you do not have sufficient presence there of marshals and other people to manage it and it just simply creates a risky environment.

CHAIR - Can I suggest then that the public relations in getting that message out to the wider community have not exactly hit the mark because I am not aware personally of the things that you have spoken of today and I am sure there are others in the community who also are not aware.

Mr COX - Can I say in defence of the commissioner, I do not know that it is the commissioner's role to do that.

CHAIR - The minister's?

Mr COX - Well, I do not know that it is mine either. The promoter of the race has certainly gone to the media. I notice strangely enough -

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, I take your point but as soon as we do that, people accuse us of spinning and being spin doctors. The reality is that the northern district commander was on radio a number of times explaining our position in relation to this and it has been in the newspapers. Short of taking out an advertisement with a view to promoting a different point of view I am not sure what else I should be expected to do to explain it to the community. Do not get me wrong, I love to have our views clearly articulated but if our colleagues in the media do not give us the coverage that we want. I am not sure how much more I can do.

Mrs JAMIESON - You have six voices here for you. We will be trying to spread the word.

Mr COX - The representative from the northern newspaper is hiding behind a computer.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister, I appreciate your response.

Mr COX - And it was one with regret.

CHAIR - It is always a good opportunity to explore some of these issues in further detail.

Mr COX - As I say it was one with regret.

Mrs JAMIESON - When you mentioned traffic banking up behind cyclists, that also raises the issue of motor homes, which travel in convoys - they get off the boat and all go up the highway together.

Mr JOHNSTON - Mrs Jamieson, I think we should support the grey nomads at our age.

Mrs JAMIESON - Absolutely.

Mr JOHNSTON - I think that would be a good thing to do, as long as they obey the law.

Mr COX - I think most of them are law abiding.

Mrs JAMIESON - They are inclined to travel in convoys, and the same with trucks.

Mr JOHNSTON - Unfortunately, if they obey the law there is nothing you can do about that.

CHAIR - In light of that discussion we will move onto output group 2 which is crime detection and investigation, 2.1, and I am sure that Mr Dean has something to open up with.

Output group 2
Crime detection and investigation

2.1 Investigation of crime -

Mr DEAN - The very first point I want to come to is armed hold-ups. Now it is quite an alarming rate and it has been an alarming rate, I think, over a fairly long period. At one stage we were simply told that this was just a spate - that we have them from time to time, they drop out and they come back in. But this spate has now been going on for so long that it can no longer be called a spate. I do not know whether it is just getting more publicity than it should but there were reports in the paper again yesterday - another armed hold-up and convictions. My question, Minister, is what can we do to get on top of this and deter this type of activity because it is frightening and concerning a lot of people out there.

Mr COX - Mr Dean, it is a good question, and I think anybody who has ever been involved in any way in an armed robbery knows that it is a terrible thing and it is not something you would wish upon anybody. The figures that I have show that there has actually been a reduction. It certainly appears that armed robberies have been increasing over the past five years. There is no significant trend detected over the past 60 months.

These are the figures for armed robberies per district. Let me give you a comparison from last year to this year. In the southern district - and there are a couple missing, I accept that - last year to 30 April was 43, this year it is 20. In the northern district there were 16 last year and 17 this year, so it is up one in the north. There were 10 in the eastern district in 2007 and 10 in 2008. In the western district there were three in 2006-07 and two in 2008. So, statewide there were 72 in 2006-07 and 49 in 2007-08. In 2008 there were 21 offences, with 29 people charged. I do not know if the commissioner has other statistics and figures - I know we have a graph there.

Mr DEAN - Quite obviously, the 2007-08 period is yet to finish?

Mr COX - That is right, but the figures that I gave you were to 30 April, so they were comparable.

Mr JOHNSTON - Mr Dean, if you have a look at the graph in the handout, you will note -

Mr DEAN - I do not think it really matters too much what the figures say, it is the perception of the people, unfortunately, and they see it as a huge problem. Therefore, we would like to see these numbers dropping more. While I accept those figures and I do not dispute them, what strategies are in place to try to bring some control to this area to stop it happening?

Mr COX - I will answer that in two parts. I will let the commissioner take that on board and answer that but I just want to make a comment. An article I read in the paper - and I do not know which paper it was; I think it may have been a southern one - referred to there now being a spate or a wave. I read the article and the wave referred to one that had occurred, one the previous month and one in March. Now if that is a wave, my God I would not want to surf on it. A lot of it, I think, is how the media portray it. I think you are quite right. Is there something in place? That is a question for the commissioner.

Mr JOHNSTON - I reinforce what the minister said to you, Mr Dean. This is about perception, not reality. The nature of some armed robberies committed in the last year is of concern because they are different from those committed before and they were particularly more violent. Thankfully, a vast majority of them have been cleaned up. But I support the minister's observations because, quite seriously, the inflammatory language used in one of the newspapers in relation to this is just simply scaremongering. Whilst I do not, for one minute, try to gloss over the fact that these incidents are happening, the press report language is frightening the community unnecessarily.

Having said that, you ask the question about what are we doing about it. The police can only play a certain part in deterring would-be robbers. The first part of that is to give them some certainty that they are likely to get caught because that is our job. The greatest deterrent for somebody to prevent them from committing crime is to give them certainty that we will catch them and that the judicial process will take its place thereafter. We have an extremely high success rate, as you know, in catching armed robbers. The reason for that is simple, and that is that they are high priority to us; we assemble task forces where we need to and we go about our task with great enthusiasm because, as you would well know, one thing detectives do not like is having significant armed robberies unsolved on their books.

I must confess I was a little disappointed recently when the DPP's representative on a trial argued for stronger penalties for an armed robber and that particular armed robber did not get an

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increased penalty but a penalty of 18 months imprisonment which, in my view, was not reflective of the level of concern that is being shown by the community in relation to these armed robberies.

I am really interested and pleased that this is a discussion that this committee wants to have because I think it is a matter that needs to be addressed in the community by all of us but it needs to be addressed in a calm, methodical and reasoned way.

[11.45 a.m.]

CHAIR - That is how we have all our discussions.

Mr JOHNSTON - The only other two very quick points I make is that we are working on an advisory booklet for business owners as to how to deal with armed robberies and how to prevent them and, as we would call it in our jargon, 'target harden' to prevent them from becoming a victim of armed robbery. Then on top of that of course we are also looking at engaging business owners to introduce more good quality CCTV capabilities within their businesses so that in the unlikely event, and it is unlikely, that they are the victim then we will get good evidence to be able to catch the villains so that we can get them before the court and, hopefully, get increased penalties that are reflective of the community concern.

Mr DEAN - My question was going to be on what you have done for businesses so thank you for answering that. That saved me asking the question.

I go to another headline in the paper, and once again I do not know whether this is scaremongering or not but the figures I read probably would not indicate that it is scaremongering. The next one was 'Car torch epidemic hits State' and that was a report made on 11 April 2008 where it identifies the number of vehicles that have been destroyed by fire and deliberately in most cases. If you look at those figures they are quite alarming. Since 1 January to 11 April there were 150 cars destroyed by fire and the greater majority were deliberately lit fires. Without going into more of that detail and the huge numbers there, Minister, what can the police do to control this to get on top of it and strategies that they have around this as well? Most of it is done by juveniles, I suspect. So what are we doing?

Mr COX - Again, the commissioner has full knowledge on this because it is an operational matter, as you would know.

Mr JOHNSTON - Quite simply, the number of stolen motor cars is down and we are thankful for that but the number of burnt motor vehicles has been pretty constant for a couple of years now and a large majority of them, if not all, are done by people who are seeking to destroy any evidence of their identity that might have been left in or around the vehicle. I can tell you that I have been in discussions with our colleagues from the forensic science laboratory and, as a consequence of that, we are looking at a revised attendance model for where those vehicles are burnt out. We have started to implement it so that we can get a higher level of forensic examination because the misconception that some people have that all DNA is burnt in a fire is wrong. We are going to spend more time identifying what is left so that we can go after the people who have burnt those cars.

I can tell you that our business plan for next year quite clearly articulates our concern in relation to this and the fact that it is one of our priority areas to address.

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Mr DEAN - DNA - that gives me the opportunity now to go into that. The success rate of DNA within the service, Minister, is that still achieving good results, where are we and are there any problems there?

Mr COX - Mr Dean, I went up there a couple of months back and it is not as you see it on TV.

Mr DEAN - They are good those programs, they always get them.

Mr COX - I think they give a false sense of what can be achieved but I found it fascinating. Basically, it is exactly what you do see and it is an eye opener for somebody like me to go in. It is a good news story. The work that they do is exceptional. They are currently in the process of progressing further changes. They are looking at how they can streamline improve the capture of identic information that they have. They are looking at new system data input measuring such as bar code reading, the introduction of a unique identifying number to cover all three forensic samples. They are going to distribute it across other Department of Police and Emergency Management electronic systems. They are working to implement a whole new batch of procedures but, again, the commissioner is far more au fait with the operations of the forensic procedures than I am.

Mr JOHNSTON - Minister, the first observation I make is that we are the only jurisdiction in this country that does not have a DNA testing backlog.

Mr DEAN - That was my next question.

Mr JOHNSTON - Fortunately we are in a position where we can now deliver a DNA sample to the laboratory and within only the time that it takes to process it - and I agree with the minister that it is not five minutes like on the *CSI* - a couple of days later the results will come. If the profile of that person is on the DNA database in this State or in any other State we will be able to identify them there and then, which leads us to be able to capture these people at a much earlier stage. The number of identifications and everything else is growing weekly and it is an area of our activity that has been a very, very useful investment.

Mr DEAN - So there are no outstanding serious murder cases where DNA could be tested?

Mr JOHNSTON - There is no backlog on DNA. Other areas of forensic services are sometimes the subject of backlog but I have been told by the director out there that there are no backlog cases now.

Mr HINE - Some of the numbers, Mr Dean, are: 568 crime scenes to personal DNA matches where the injuries were very suspect for the 12 months up to 31 March; 463 crime scenes to person DNA matches where there were no suspects and it actually identified someone; 89 crime scene DNA matches where we have matched various crime scenes and 306 suspects were excluded by DNA results as well. So there have been good results.

Mrs JAMIESON - On the question of DNA, Commissioner or Minister, I refer to a gentleman whom you are both aware of. In his case DNA was forwarded but he was named before the results were known. Is that the situation or are procedures going to change now because we have a more graphic DNA identification system?

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Mr COX - I do not know that I want to comment on that particular case. It is over and it was an unfortunate -

Mrs JAMIESON - It is not over though; that is the whole problem. As far as the charges and all the rest of it goes it is over, yes, but it is not over as far as the man is concerned. -

Mr COX - I think there is a claim for compensation that is currently with the Attorney-General.

CHAIR - So I guess the question is: has the process changed?

Mrs JAMIESON - Are the processes going to change in the future so that people are not named until they have been proved guilty or not guilty?

Mr COX - All right.

Mr JOHNSTON - The answer to that is simple. It is a case-by-case proposition. The reality is that if someone is charged based on other evidence and even though there may be DNA evidence available then their name will be released through the court process, not through any other.

Mrs JAMIESON - But surely that process could be changed in order to protect the person?

Mr JOHNSTON - All I am saying is at this stage there is no intention, as I understand it, by anybody to change that process for that reason.

Mrs JAMIESON - You are having a look at your procedures and what have you so surely -

Mr JOHNSTON - But this is not a procedure for the police.

Mrs JAMIESON - I appreciate what you are saying but it is the flow-on effect.

Mr JOHNSTON - Our job is to gather the evidence, charge people where necessary and put them before the court. What happens after that - and we do not release people's names at the time of charging; it is only when they go before the court that it is an open court process that has their name released.

Mrs JAMIESON - So we need to have some recommendations that something changes because this affects people's lives for the rest of their days. And it is not just him, there are a couple of other people too whose lives have been ruined anyway. They are certainly not very comfortable and we have a lot of angry people in the Devonport area because of what has happened to this one gentleman, but there are a couple of other cases too.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mrs Jamieson. We know that is a particularly difficult case.

Mr FINCH - I am looking at the performance information on page 10.8, table 10.6. From the report that you have given us this morning I feel that the police can be proud of their performance.

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I am really impressed with the figures about the community perception of feeling safe at home by day and by night. The outcome of investigations of crime against the person at 95 per cent is also highly creditable. However, the difficult area of property crime hovers at a fairly low clean-up rate so I am wondering if you would like to comment on that, Minister, and tell me about any new strategies that might be possible to assist in that area.

Mr COX - I said to the commissioner that I thought he was travelling pretty well, but he might like to comment.

Mr JOHNSTON - This might require a little bit of a story, unfortunately. Years ago when I was a detective in the CIB the clean-up rate at that time on property crime was less than 8 per cent. I remember writing a response to the then superintendent in charge of Criminal Investigations when he tried to get a higher clearance rate out of us, to point out to him that it was just not possible, that he was living in cloud-cuckoo-land if he expected any better performance in crime clearance rates than that. When I became the deputy commissioner I actually said that crime clearance rates were not good enough and then embarked upon a strategy to try to increase them. Similarly, I was told by others in the organisation at the time that I was living in cloud-cuckoo-land and they could not be improved. I am really proud to say that by the efforts of all our people we now have them up in the vicinity of 32 per cent. I think that is a very significant number. If you think about it, they include the whole gamut of offences, right down to someone stealing a letterbox or a garden gnome if that is reported to us. Whilst they may be very important matters to the individual who has lost them, it may be that that is not where your priority for investigation resources is at a particular time. The reality is that you can only ever do so much. If the Government gave me another 100 detectives then I am sure I could improve the crime clearance rate, but I am sure the Government would be reluctant to do that because of the simple cost.

CHAIR - Have you asked for them?

Mr JOHNSTON - For another 100, no I have not.

Mr COX - He probably knows the answer.

Mr JOHNSTON - I have to do the best with the resources available to us across a whole raft of different activities. Whilst I would love to see a 100 per cent clearance rate on both, the chances of that are pretty remote for just the reasons I have outlined.

Mr DEAN - The otherwise -cleaned-up category took a rise there at one stage back in our time, didn't it?

Mr JOHNSTON - It did. I do not want to go down that path but we did not report nearly as much crime in those days either because we got into trouble for it.

Mr Finch, I appreciate your concern because it is an area that the community is concerned about but we are doing better now than we have at any time in our history. The more we reduce crime, which to me is the key because then we have fewer victims - and that is where our energies should go - the better off we are going to be because we will not have to clean up as many to get a higher percentage.

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Mrs JAMIESON - Do you have any figures then as to whether people's homes are more safe now? Are people taking more proactive measures themselves?

Mr JOHNSTON - If you have a look at the significant reduction in home burglaries over the last 10 years, it is dramatic. We do not claim credit for that because a lot of people have put in security systems at home, they have made their homes much more secure. The community is far more vigilant now than they were. The bottom line is that people should feel safer at home now than they ever have before. We would hope that one day the message will get out about the really low rate of home burglaries and the really high clearance rate of home burglaries.

Mr DEAN - That is the national position now around the country.

Ms RITCHIE - I just want to place on record that I had some involvement with the police service in relation to armed robberies last year. I am not going to go into detail for obvious reasons, but I wanted to congratulate the service for the level of understanding I was able to obtain through that involvement. Their activities were just wonderful and I just wanted to congratulate them for that before I move onto my question. You may or may not be able to give detail, but looking at the history of armed robberies we would expect to see increases in armed robberies when times are economically not as good. When we have economic depression one would expect to see increases in these types of offences. That is not the case now and I did catch on to the comment you made that you are concerned about some aspects of the level of violence associated with these particular armed robberies we have seen. Can you give us an indication of how many of these that we know of are drug related?

[12 00 p.m.]

Mr JOHNSTON - I think a very significant number of them are drug related. Unfortunately, it is not a statistic that is easy to gather because, quite simply, the reality is, firstly you have to catch offender to find out what the motivation was. Until you catch them you do not know what their motivation is and when we do catch them, unfortunately a lot of them are the same offenders, time after time, from the same families.

Ms RITCHIE - I am sure it is complex and there is a mix of issues but how many of them would involve people who are drug affected?

Mr JOHNSTON - The answer is we do not capture the statistics on how many are drug affected because the other element of the same statistic is, of course, how many of them committed the crime for getting drugs, as opposed to being drug affected at the time of committing the crime. Then, of course, there are those who are in concert with others who may have been drug affected at the time. There was a report recently in paper where a young woman committed an armed robbery just for the purpose of getting money to buy prescription drugs.

Ms RITCHIE - I was just trying to understand what I would see as a historical anomaly in terms of economics. One of the other issues of interest to me, as a person living in a regional area now, is that of stock theft. Are there any issues there that you can talk to us about?

Mr COX - There are stock thefts.

Ms RITCHIE - I know.

Mr DEAN - One conviction recently on DNA.

Mr COX - That is a great story. It an excellent story.

CHAIR - But is a short story.

Laughter.

Mr COX - It is going to be a short story now. There are full-time stock officers who are deployed within Tasmania Police. I reckon this will surprise people because from 1 July 2007 to 17 July 2008 there were 3 518 sheep and lambs reported stolen.

Mr DEAN - None by foxes?

Laughter.

Mr COX - We do not do foxes. There were 39 cattle and calves and the value was \$118 000. Those thefts were reported across 27 different crime reports, 15 in the south and 12 in the north. During that period there were three offenders charged with the related offences. Mr Dean made a comment in one notable case. DNA analysis was used in a matter occurring in 2006 and the link was butchered meat with a butchered carcass resulting in a conviction. They went to the butcher where the carcass had been butchered and of course, 'No it's not mine, I don't know anything about it', so they took a DNA test on the carcass and were able to prove -

Ms RITCHIE - Does that apply to dog attacks as well? Do the police get involved at that DNA level if someone has had stock attacked by savage dogs in the area?

Mr COX - I am not aware of DNA ever being used in that area. I am not aware that anyone has ever gone to that level. But in the future, maybe. Why wouldn't you or couldn't you do that?

Ms RITCHIE - We have had personal experience of that, where dogs have attacked and killed hundreds of sheep. So they are issues for people in regional areas from a DNA perspective.

Mr COX - There is certainly a butcher now who knows that DNA can be used.

Mr WING - I was interested, Minister, I think it was you or the Commissioner mentioned the effect of unemployment rates and Ms Ritchie mentioned the economy. What effect, if any, do you feel that the state of the economy has on the crime statistics generally? I take it, from what you said about unemployment, that it would seem that that does have a relevance?

Mr COX - I do not have the statistics, obviously, Mr Wing. The one that springs to my mind would be drive-away petrol thefts. I am aware that they have increased. But as far as being able to put a figure on the others is concerned, the Commissioner may be able to do that. I certainly do not have them in my head.

Mr JOHNSTON - I do not have the figures, Minister, but the point, I think is well made, that in a lot of these categories the crime rate is coming down across the nation. I think we can be proud of the fact that our rate of improvement is better than most, if not all. But it is coming down across the nation and, of course, one thing that is consistent across the country is the more buoyant economy. But I have to say that Western Australia, which has probably the most buoyant economy, is not experiencing the level of reduction in crime that I would have hoped for were I

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the Commissioner in Western Australia in those sort of economic times. I think that just reinforces the fact that there are a range of factors at play that influence the commission of crime and the resolution of crime, from our point of view, after they have been committed.

Mr WING - I must say that the set of statistics are most impressive and reflect admirably on the efficiency of the force. That is to be congratulated. On the question of robberies, there was no scale of the clear-up rate there. There has been an upsurge recently in robberies and armed robberies and then the decline currently. But with the other categories the table has shown the clear-up rate. It is interesting in the others that there is a correlation between the clear-up rate and a decline in the numbers so the fact that detection is more prevalent is obviously having a deterrent effect on the commission of crime.

Mr JOHNSTON - Thank you, Mr Wing. The first comment I make is if we were to put all the good-news stories in all the graphs it would be about 40 pages thick because, quite simply, when it comes to armed robbery clearance rates, our 2007 clearance rate was 78 per cent and so far this financial year our clearance rate is 87.8 per cent. We need to be very careful talking about statistics in that way because it might be that you catch two or three people for one particular armed robbery and of course that improves the clearance rate as a percentage overall because they are counted as separate numbers. In the same way, when a hotel was subject to an armed robbery some time back I think there 20 people in the hotel at the time and that was counted as 20 armed robberies. So it is swings and roundabouts.

Mr WING - Were they all robbed?

Mr JOHNSTON - Not directly but they were all part of the robbery and they were all victims so it comes down to the victimisation rate. All I can say is that our clearance rate is very high - 87.8 per cent.

Mr WING - That is on armed robberies?

Mr JOHNSTON - Armed robberies.

Mr WING - And other robberies?

Mr JOHNSTON - It is in the more elongated version so I cannot help you with that one.

Mr WING - That is fine. I do not ask that it be provided later. I am satisfied with what I have.

Mrs JAMIESON - I understand Tasmania Police has a drug diversion policy. Do you have any comment to make on that? It is to deal with minor offenders I presume or something like that. Could you give me an indication of the number of people who have received cautions and/or been diverted and/or the effectiveness of that and whether or not they reoffended?

Mr JOHNSTON - Mrs Jamieson, we have a range of entry points for illicit drug diversion but suffice to say there is the Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative which has three levels. The first is the Cannabis Cautioning Program then there are interventions for other drugs. People get three shots at cannabis and two shots at other drugs before they become prosecution statistics. So far in the current year 1 576 people have received drug diversions.

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Mrs JAMIESON - So that is up to what, April?

Mr JOHNSTON - No, that is at the end of May. That compares with 1 423 last year for the same time. I cannot tell you, from these numbers, how many of them are juveniles but a large number are young people.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you would classify juvenile as what? Under 18?

Mr JOHNSTON - Under 18, and a lot of the diversions are delivered by our uniformed police, not just our drug squad.

Mrs JAMIESON - Then referred to drug and alcohol or health services et cetera?

Mr JOHNSTON - The second level diversion for cannabis and the first level diversion for other drugs are referred to health services and they are funded through the national initiative for delivery of those services. There has been a very significant evaluation done nationally, of the value of the program. I cannot talk about the numbers in it because I simply cannot remember them but it is a very positive program that diverts young people and very few come back.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is that diversionary program separately funded or is it one of those absorbed costs?

Mr JOHNSTON - It is separately funded under Commonwealth funding that only goes for another six months and then will be subject to national Government consideration.

Mrs JAMIESON - What is the level of funding that we get from the Commonwealth?

Mr JOHNSTON - The funding we get equates to about two FTEs. That is really only for the delivery of the program, not the policing part of the program.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you wouldn't have an overall cost of what our drug problems are costing us?

Mr JOHNSTON - No.

Mr DEAN - The next area was after the headlines, 'Police accused in porn inquiry' and 'Police implicated in porn inquiry'. In asking my question on this, I applied for details of this through FOI but it was denied. However, with the recent Ombudsman's finding on this I reapplied but I do not have the benefit of that at this stage.

Mr COX - You may not need it. We might be able to settle it for you now.

Mr DEAN - I have a number of questions in relation to this. It is a very significant and serious issue because the alleged offender in this instance, to my knowledge, had a prior conviction for pornography and paedophilic activity. This matter was raised, it fell out of time and no charges could be referred against this person.

We know, and I do not want to reveal names in this instance - I could but I won't - that a sergeant was castigated and disciplined as a result of failing to bring the matter before the court in sufficient time. My concern is, Minister, the internal investigation found against the sergeant, not

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against senior officers. What other senior officers were involved in this incident and knew about the investigation but did not follow it through and ensure that it was completed properly?

Mr COX - Mr Dean, I am aware of this. We went into this yesterday in great detail and I certainly respect the fact that you would like to do that again. For obvious reasons, the Commissioner has had a full brief on this and understands it thoroughly so, on that basis, I would ask him to give you that explanation. Perhaps you will not need your FOI after this.

Mr DEAN - I hope that is the case because it has been difficult - it has been like extracting teeth from a chook - you just cannot get the information.

Mr COX - Let the commissioner put his story to you and we will see where we go from there.

[12.15 p.m.]

Mr JOHNSTON - So everyone is aware of what it is that we are talking about I will give some history. In November 2002, an inspector of police who is also a member of a community organisation and sits on the board, became aware that a computer belonging to that organisation contained child pornography images. He did exactly what I would want him to do. He took that matter straight to the CIB and reported it. The board, as I understand it, supported him in that view.

The later forensic examination of that computer revealed that there were over 1 000 images of child pornography stored on the computer which was pretty sad. In December of the same year that detective swore out a warrant issued by a JP and went and searched the suspect in the matter. He found more computer images, hard drives, CDs and contained on them were 2 100 images that we considered to be pornographic; 12 video files and Word documents, all potentially in breach of the legislation.

As Mr Dean points out, that matter was investigated but it was not until January 2005 that the matter came to light that a prosecution had not ensued. In January 2005, our forensic computing police officer was cleaning out some of the storage capacity that he has and identified that these images were still stored there. He checked to see what the results of the prosecution were, because he expected that there would have been by that time, but he simply found that there had not been a prosecution. He made inquiries in relation to it, he expressed his concern to a more senior officer and that senior officer, in turn, reported the matter to me.

As a result of that, I immediately sat down with the then Ombudsman, Jan O'Grady, and brought to her attention these very serious allegations because there were effectively two different types of allegation. The first allegation was that the inspector had, maybe, inappropriately put pressure on the investigating sergeant to not investigate and/or prosecute the matter that had been brought to his attention. The second and equally as serious, or maybe even more serious, allegation was the failure to initiate the prosecution that, on the evidence that was available, could have been initiated. I agree with Mr Dean, the suspect in that matter had a prior conviction for a similar behaviour. All of those factors together heightened my concern about the allegation that was brought to my attention.

In sitting down and discussing the ongoing investigation with the then Ombudsman, I had appointed a commander from the western district to come to Hobart to conduct the inquiry. The Ombudsman agreed that they would participate in the investigation with me because of the nature

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of the allegations that were being made and the potential for them to be very serious - or, it was obvious that they were serious. A member of her office assisted on the investigation. At the conclusion of the investigation the investigation file with recommendations was presented to me. I in turn shared that with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman agreed with that report and made some additional observations about things that the office wanted to implement and, as Mr Dean quite rightly points out, disciplinary action was taken against the sergeant for his failure to prosecute.

I need to point out that it was through inadvertence; the sergeant's understanding of the period of time available to him to start the prosecution was flawed. The period of time is commonly called the statute of limitations, but the statute of limitations had expired and it was not as long as he thought it would be. It is for that simple reason. I must indicate that since that time, the legislation has been amended to increase the period of time available for the commencement of a prosecution under those provisions. That is the reason for and the circumstances of the matter. There is no doubt that the senior officers of the sergeant, in doing their job, should have been expected to know that no prosecution had been initiated -

Mr DEAN - Sorry, what did you say - weren't expected to know?

Mr JOHNSTON - Were expected to know. I would expect them to know.

Mr DEAN - That comes to my next question. You can see what I am going to ask.

Mr JOHNSTON - Once it became evident that there was no criminality or corruption involved in the allegations and it was simply, to put it bluntly, very poor police work and very poor supervision of that police work, it was more about finding ways to prevent it from happening again. As a consequence of that I put into place a raft of measures to ensure that there was no repeat. The Ombudsman recommended to me a raft of other measures that could be considered to be put into effect to prevent such a recurrence, and that has happened. Just as a final observation, and I am sorry, Madam Chair, for taking so long but it really is a very important matter and we can see the enthusiasm that Mr Dean had to pursue it - the FOI applications came in and were dealt with in accordance with the FOI act, for no reason other than that. The police officers, in my view, if they were not the subject of criminal prosecution -

Mr DEAN - Well, dealt with in relation to your perception and position on the FOI act because the Ombudsman found differently.

Mr JOHNSTON - Again, I do not want to get into a debate about this. It was dealt with in accordance with the act and the act says that someone - our FOI officer - has a look at to to decide what should or should not be released under the act. If that is not a decision that meets with favour of the applicant, it is subject to a review process. We went through the review process and then, if that process does not meet the aspirations of the applicant, it can be reviewed by the Ombudsman. That is what the act provides and that is exactly what happened in this case. The communication between a media organisation, the Ombudsman and my department over a long time resulted in the Ombudsman releasing a set of findings that were published on the Ombudsman's web site and were then picked up the *Examiner* and were quite properly and accurately reported. At that stage, they did not have the actual FOI material. The Ombudsman, in completing his reasons for decision, sent back to me all of the documents that he considered should be released under FOI to the media organisation, with certain parts expunged. It was only on Friday of last week that the final decisions were made about what could be released in

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conjunction with the Ombudsman's office. I am aware of your letter, Mr Dean, and to save me the postage of a very heavy document I am happy to give it to you now.

Mr DEAN - I am very pleased to receive this after so long. I think it has taken about 12 months.

Mr JOHNSTON - Let me tell you, with the media organisation it has taken over two years.

Mr DEAN - I have a couple of questions following on from your comment. I will go to where the Ombudsman revealed that the inspector - and this is the allegation:

'Later contacted a sergeant in charge of the investigation by phone and email, allegedly leaning on him to not prosecute.'

Were you satisfied at any internal investigation that that side of it was investigated sufficiently to ensure that that did not happen or the likelihood of it happening was not there? We were told that there was an e-mail to the sergeant, and the sergeant, as I understand, supports all of that. What was your position to that? Was the sergeant lying or was he mistaken? What is the position?

Mr JOHNSTON - It is not my recollection that the sergeant said he was leaned on; in fact, it is the opposite. The sergeant did not say that. I think that what might have happened is that a constable attributed a conversation that he had with the sergeant as saying one thing that the sergeant did not agree with when he was interviewed. I am now going from memory on a lot of this, but my recollection is that the investigators identified that there was no inappropriate or undue pressure put on. When I say 'investigators' I mean the Ombudsman and the senior police officer, not just the police officer. They were satisfied that the inspector had shown a degree of naivety in his approach to the sergeant but that there was no criminal or improper conduct.

Mr DEAN - That brings me to the next question. You have accepted the fact that there was poor supervision of the sergeant. I suspect there were a number of senior officers to the sergeant who knew about this inquiry, and even perhaps the commissioner's office knew about this inquiry because of where it had come from and the ramifications that it could have had. You have already said that there was poor supervision, so what happened to those officers providing the poor supervision? Was any action taken against those officers?

Mr JOHNSTON - No direct disciplinary action.

Mr DEAN - The sergeant was hung out to dry.

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes, because the sergeant was the one who made the biggest mistake.

Mr DEAN - Some might argue with that and say the supervising officers made the biggest mistake.

Mr JOHNSTON - That may be so, Mr Dean, and you know that I have an extremely strong view on making sure that senior officers are accountable for the actions of their subordinates. I have had the view for 10 or 11 years, probably longer. I suppose that would indicate the fact that I was prepared to acknowledge that this particular matter slipped through a net that should not have been as porous as it was.

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Mr DEAN - It was a disgraceful situation.

Mr JOHNSTON - I do not hide behind the fact that it was disgraceful, of course it was.

CHAIR - Thank you. Are there any more questions in this particular area?

Mr DEAN - The commissioner is continuing to answer the other part of that.

CHAIR - Is that the end of the statement?

Mr DEAN - So no action was taken against the supervising officer who had immediate responsibility of the sergeant?

Mr JOHNSTON - No.

Mr DEAN - None at all?

Mr JOHNSTON - No.

Mr DEAN - My next question, Minister, is do you see that as a proper and fair situation?

Mr COX - I was not familiar with the circumstances surrounding this, Mr Dean, and I am not prepared to comment on something I do not have the knowledge of. The only knowledge I have on this is a briefing that the commissioner gave me in recent days and I certainly would not be foolish enough to comment on a situation that I have do not have the knowledge of.

Mr DEAN - If I could go to areas of pornography - we have had a number of reported cases of pornography, paedophilic activity, and the current national investigation and I think there is a story in the paper today. Minister, where are we with that type of crime and position in this State? Do we have the appropriate resources within the police service to adequately police this area of paedophilic activity?

Mr COX - Obviously that is an operational matter for the commissioner, Mr Dean.

Mr JOHNSTON - In recognition of the increasing number of reports of matters of this nature and of course the community concern around it and our own concern around it, we increased the number of forensic computing resources from one to two and it would seem as though that has been pretty effective because the backlog of cases that was there 15 or 18 months ago is no longer there in the nature of those sorts of investigations.

Unfortunately the number of matters referred to as now involving mobile phones is starting to take up a lot of time where people are taking inappropriate images on their mobile phone or sharing them with each other across mobile phones. Please do not misunderstand me, everything in policing has to be prioritised. We will put our energies into the computer activities first and then there is a descending order. My understanding is that if no others came, in all of our backlog would be removed within six weeks, and that includes the mobile phones.

We do take it seriously. I made a comment yesterday that when you involve people you can never guarantee that there won't be mistakes into the future, no matter what systems you put into

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place, but I would hope that that never gets repeated because we do take it seriously. It is actually abhorrent.

Mr DEAN - My next question is in relation to prostitution in this State. Is there any evidence of prostitution occurring contrary to the legislation now in this State? Have the police been successful in identifying any prostitution rackets that might be occurring? Is it in control, increasing or where are we with it? Is the current legislation - and I think I know what the answer will be - the legislation that they need to control this type of activity?

Mr COX - I was going to ask you what your answer was going to be but I reckon you are probably right. I have some knowledge on this but not enough to give you a detailed answer.

CHAIR - You are supposed to say you have no knowledge.

Mr COX - The question was about the policing procedure.

Mrs JAMIESON - Oh, sorry. I am glad you clarified that.

Mr COX - I hope Hansard got the clarification.

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, Mr Dean is quite right. There has been a significant change in the legislation over time. We have conducted a number of policing operations for the purposes of determining whether or not people are breaking the law and none of those has yet resulted in a prosecution but that process has also led us to identify some issues with the legislation and we have done exactly what people would expect of us. We have contacted the agency that has the administrative responsibility for the legislation and pointed out to the Justice Department the concerns that we have. What they do with it of course is a matter for them, not for us, but our job is to keep dealing with the legislation that we have.

[12.30 p.m.]

Mr DEAN - Have there been any reported cases of prostitution occurring in the State that police have been attempting to investigate?

Mr COX - No.

Mr DEAN - None at all?

Mr COX - Not to my knowledge no.

Mr DEAN - So whether it is or is not happening we cannot do anything about it now.

Mr JOHNSTON - Mr Dean I have no doubt that prostitution is happening in this State -

Mr DEAN - Sure.

Mr JOHNSTON - but is it happening against the laws that we currently have? One thing that I can say, as you would be well aware we have ongoing intelligence activity in relation to prostitution in this State. That happens constantly, that is being done all the time and if that yields sufficient information for us to then initiate a further investigation we will do that.

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CHAIR - Mr Dean, are you happy to share the questioning around at this stage?

Mr DEAN - I am.

Mrs JAMIESON - Madam Chair, I was going to raise a similar issue and I was wondering whether or not, Minister, you and the commissioner are happy with the legislation that was put in place and can you tell us what the shortcomings might be?

Mr COX - I can tell you I am happy because there have been no arrests and no complaints but the commissioner may have a different view of it. It is not an area that I have a great deal of knowledge about.

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, as I have indicated, there are some issues with the legislation that we would like to see changed and they have been taken up with the Department of Justice.

Mrs JAMIESON - Can you not share that with us or is it a little early?

Mr JOHNSTON - I prefer not to at the moment because by doing so it would give some courage to those who would want to break the law to know the areas of the law that we are concerned about.

Mr WING - I can appreciate your difficulties because the first bill was brought in to decriminalise prostitution and then the same minister brought in another one to criminalise it so I have sympathy for the force.

Mrs JAMIESON - Oh I do indeed,

My further question on the legislation was I notice here on page 8 in your crime report, business plan, that you are going to continue to lead legislative reform relating to bail issues and recidivist offenders. Have we any indication as to what those improvements might be or changes to the legislation might be?

Mr JOHNSTON - You might recall that there has been some publicity around the fact that Tasmania Police were preparing a business case around bail options. We do recognise that it is inappropriate sometimes for some people to be remanded in custody when other options are available. We have been doing some work on the development of this business case to share with our colleagues at the Department of Health and Human Services in relation to juvenile justice and with our colleagues at the Department of Justice in relation to adult offenders and once we have agreement about that we will put the business case to Government to see whether or not there are some options for going forward.

Mrs JAMIESON - Thank you.

Further to that, any cyber crime policies?

CHAIR - Mrs Jamieson, policies will probably -

Mrs JAMIESON - I was going to ask whether there have been any cyber crimes that we as a police force have been involved in? Has there been any criminal activity, bullying, theft and pornography too, of course?

Mr HINE - We are involved constantly with crime committed over the Internet, eBay and those types of situations; we are involved in those constantly. There is an increase in that area Australia-wide. There are difficulties in relation to policing that. You have to involve other policing services not just around the nation but around the world often but, yes, there is certainly a trend upwards that is worldwide because of the number of transactions that we do across the Internet these days. So we are certainly active in that and we do training in relation to how we police it, investigate it and we are on several national committees in relation to cyber crime as well.

CHAIR - That will be one less for later in the day.

Mr FINCH - Through you, Minister - if I could flesh out a little bit more on the subject of prostitution. I am wondering if the commissioner could give me some sort of picture of some concerns that have been expressed in the past in respect to prostitution in Tasmania about encouragement of minors into prostitution, firstly, about drug activity within prostitution circles and also reports of violence against those who are involved in prostitution.

Mr JOHNSTON - Madam Chair, I think the answer to that is relatively simple in each case. We do hear of each of those matters being the subject of allegations from time to time. As I indicated in response to Mr Dean, where that is brought to our attention we will investigate it. We have not yet found any evidence of any of the three where it has been brought to our attention. In addition to that, the intelligence probes assessments that we do from time to time specifically are targeted at the three activity areas that you mentioned and, again, we have not found any evidence of it. The most recent attendance by a large number of police at an establishment that was believed to be being used for the purposes of prostitution did not identify any young people, did not identify any drugs or drug-taking paraphernalia and no-one that was there made any allegations that they were the victims of violence. That is part of the issue that we have to deal with in the legislation.

Output group 3
Traffic law enforcement and road safety

3.2 Accident reduction and road safety -

Mr WING - I would like to ask firstly about the Government's attitude to requiring learner drivers to undertake a set course of instruction where films could be used to give hints about what to do in the case of emergency and encouraging learner drivers to have a greater knowledge and greater skills and a greater appreciation of the consequences of not driving safely. At the moment, I do not know the percentage but a lot of learner drivers get licences when they have not had any professional training at all and it seems to me that it would help to encourage the right attitude, which is an important factor in road safety, if there were to be a requirement for some course to be undertaken, not a physical driving one but advisory.

Mr COX - You have taken me back into my infrastructure days but I am very happy to answer it and we will take it out under road safety.

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One of the difficulties with the suggestion that you make is that very few people would be inclined to give a course for free. You would remember that we were the first State or Territory to bring in the 50 hours' mandatory training and that has now gone to level 1 and level 2 so that has been increased and, dare I say, made it more difficult but also given the opportunity for learner drivers to get much more experience.

Mr WING - Which is important.

Mr COX - Absolutely. There were instances that we became aware of where young people were going to get a licence and they had never driven at night or they had never driven over the Tasman Bridge.

Mr WING - Or on gravel roads perhaps.

Mr COX - Exactly.

Mrs JAMIESON - Or on wet roads.

Mr WING - In the rain.

Mr COX - All of the above actually. We had a look at that through the Road Safety Council which Tasmania Police have representation on. The recommendations were brought forward and we implemented those recommendations. That has changed again and the current Minister for Infrastructure is in the process of now implementing a new learner program. I guess what you are basically asking for is a mandatory training process and I do not know how you do that because there are certain social environments where people are not able to pay for that. It is a difficulty now to get some people to get their 50 hours' training. Some of the service providers have been very good in that process.

Mr WING - Perhaps to save your time, I am not suggesting a compulsory course of actually training people to drive but for them to participate in and to have a few hours of verbal advice about what to do in emergencies, et cetera.

Mr COX - Again, it depends on who that advice is coming from. That is one of the issues.

Mr WING - To be shown films about the consequences of certain actions, what to do in a skid, films like that to encourage the right attitude.

Mr COX - There is a DVD that is available through schools and the percentage take-up on that has increased and it is nearly 70 per cent, from memory. One of the problems we encountered was that there were different organisations that wanted to put their hand up but they wanted to charge. Parents have the option, to be quite blunt. If they want their children to have professional lessons and they have the ability to pay for them, that is there for them. The program that is in schools is there but beyond that I am not too sure how you take it further.

Mr WING - But if it has an effect of reducing accidents and saving lives it is not unreasonable for people to be expected to pay. What I have in mind is probably three or four hours, of learner drivers going on four occasions for an hour each with somebody to give them instruction and advice, to encourage the right attitude, to point out the risks, and let parents decide whether they teach their children or whether they get the driving instructor to teach them how

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physically to drive. That is a separate matter and I am not dealing with that. I am dealing with extra advice which would be helpful for learner drivers to have so that they can be safer drivers.

Mr COX - It is very important, as I said, as to who gives that advice. There were instances when I was the minister of people who were wanting to give the advice and, to be quite blunt, you would not want them giving advice; they are the last people on this earth that you would want giving advice to our young drivers.

Mr WING - It would need to be government controlled and people appointed to do this in different regions.

Mr COX - It does open a bit of a Pandora's box. I take your point but the Government does have the education in the schools program and, as I said, the option is there for parents if they want to get professional assistance. Beyond that, I am not too sure how you extend it. The current Minister for Infrastructure may have a more open mind or may see things that I have missed.

Mr WING - I think he would be too busy playing with trains at the moment.

Laughter.

Mr COX - I do not think that is as bad as is being portrayed.

Mrs JAMIESON - I want to follow on from what Mr Wing has been saying. I would have to disagree with you because I do think we could have mandatory driving courses in schools using the 3 Rs of respect, responsibility and rights and that driving be one of the ways you learn about respect, responsibility and rights. Rotary has rider classes as well and various organisations provide free information. It is not mandatory in our schools in the grade 9s and 10s to participate in any of the classes that are available anyway. Having given the John Bowe Drive to Survive course a run, I can vouch for the fact that defensive driving is positive driving. We were taken through a course, which we paid for -

Mr COX - I know you did. Now I will disagree with you.

Mrs JAMIESON - I appreciate you will disagree, but I cannot see how you can possibly disagree when we were taught nothing that went above 65 kph. We were taught the safety factors, that before you get in the car are you fit to drive it, is your car ready to drive? They went through a whole range of those safety features; it was nothing to do with speeding. What they taught us was how to get from point A to point B safely, going from dry road to wet road and stopping within a given distance. I am quite sure a couple of other members have already alluded to the fact that they learnt a few tricks that they had forgotten. I am very pleased to know that having been driving since I was three years old on a tractor, my driving techniques were not too bad, apart from hitting an engine brake and a foot brake at the same time.

Mr DEAN - And those speeding tickets you get.

Mrs JAMIESON - But I do drive safely and I did have my seatbelt on. I would suggest, Minister, that there are ways around this. We could use our technology, as Mr Wing was suggesting. The kids are all computer savvy.

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Mr COX - The term you used was 'defensive driving'. Every piece of safety legislation in this world will tell you that is a bad thing to give learner drivers. Everyone from everywhere across the world will tell you it is the wrong thing to do.

Mrs JAMIESON - So it is terminology that has got you flummoxed?

Mr COX - Defensive driving is what you referred to.

Mrs JAMIESON - That is how it is promoted.

Mr COX - No, it is not. There are two terms for it. We need to have this discussion after. Despite what was reported, I have never spoken to John Bowe. He has never made the offer to me, it was made through a newspaper and I stand by the information I received from Monash from Vision Zero that defensive driving with learner drivers is not a good thing.

Mrs JAMIESON - I think what we are doing is playing with semantics. 'Defensive' may well be the wrong term to use and so we have the new term of 'drive to survive'.

The committee suspended from 12.45 p.m. to 1.45 p.m.