



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Jo Palmer MLC

Thursday 4 June 2026

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC (Chair)

Hon Luke Edmunds MLC

Hon Mike Gaffney MLC

Hon Casey Hiscutt MLC

Hon Meg Webb MLC

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. JO PALMER MLC

Minister for Education, Minister Children and Youth, Minister for Disability.

Ministerial Office representatives

Lisa Free

Chief of Staff

Emma Lovibond

Senior Adviser

Vanessa Field

Senior Adviser

Lucy Mercier

Senior Adviser

Sarah Quaile

Senior Adviser

Rachael Andrews

Senior Adviser

Education Portfolio

Department for Education, Children and Young People representatives

Ginna Webster

Secretary

Ross Smith

Assistant Secretary

Kane Salter

Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support

Jodee Wilson

Deputy Secretary Development and Support

Cameron Dinnessen

Acting Deputy Secretary People and Culture

David Tilley

Director Education Regulation

James Burrows

Director Office of the Secretary

Erin Lee
Principal Ministerial Officer

Katrina Porter
Senior Policy and Project Officer

Patrick Gregory
Executive Director Libraries Tasmania

Glenn Lucas
Director Finance and Budget Services

Trudy Pearce
Deputy Secretary Schools and Early Years

Children and Youth Portfolio

Department for Education, Children and Young People representatives

Ginna Webster
Secretary

Ross Smith
Assistant Secretary

Kane Salter
Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support

Peter Whitcombe
Deputy Secretary Child Safety and Youth Justice Operations

Cameron Dinnessen
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James Burrows
Director Office of the Secretary

Erin Lee
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Jason Sowell
Director Business Planning and Improvement

Tiffany Black
Executive Director Children, Young People and Families

Sharyn Cody

Director Youth Justice Facilities Reform

Sam Ledger

Director Custodial and Youth Justice Services

Zoe Robinson

Executive Director Care and Custodial Support Services

Disability Services Portfolio

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Department of Premier and Cabinet representatives

Melissa (Mel) Gray

Deputy Secretary, Policy and Reform

Ingrid Ganley

Director Disability and Reform

Kate Stewart

Senior Legal and Policy Officer, Office of the Senior Practitioner

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The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

DIVISION 2

Department of Education, Children and Young People

CHAIR - Good morning, minister. And thank you very much for coming along this morning. Great to see you here. If I could introduce my team at the table. I have the Honourable Luke Edmunds, Member for Pembroke; the Honourable Meg Webb, Member for Nelson; myself, Rosemary Armitage, Member for Launceston; the Honourable Mike Gaffney, Member for Mersey; and the Honourable Casey Hiscutt, Member for Montgomery. Our secretariat, we have James and Julie assisting us, and we have Gaye on Hansard.

Obviously, I know that, minister, you don't like to take too many questions no notice, but should you have the need, we're quite happy to send any questions to you in writing and to get a response back from you. If you'd like to introduce your team at the table and then make a short overview before we start in questions.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Absolutely. Thank you very much, Chair. Can I introduce the Secretary for the Department of Education, Children and Young People, Ginna Webster. Also at the table I have the Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support, Kane Salter. And we have a number of our deputy secretaries also in the room with us, and where we get to different line items we'll call them up to the table.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make some opening remarks regarding the work of the education portfolio spanning our schools, child and family learning centres and public libraries. I'm joined by departmental officials at the table and supported by a broader team behind the scenes. And as you noted, Chair, we will certainly endeavour to respond to all of the committee's questions today.

The Tasmanian Government's 26-27 Budget represents a continued and substantial investment in education, with over \$9 billion across four years. This investment reflects the critical role education plays in improving social and economic outcomes in Tasmania.

A central focus of this Budget is improving student outcomes through evidence-based approaches. We're investing \$16.7 million in structured literacy and numeracy reforms, supporting teachers and school leaders to deliver consistent, high-quality teaching practice across the system.

Our government already has a strong record of delivering in the early years. We are continuing to invest in the programs and services towards providing universal access, including our nation-leading Working Together initiative, providing more than 200 children a year with access to free early learning in the year before kindergarten through more than 40 ECEC providers across Tasmania.

The Budget also includes 15.5 million to implement the Violence in Schools Action Plan. This will deliver targeted trauma-informed student support and strengthen capability in schools with the greatest need. We are progressing innovative, evidence-based system reform.

I was pleased to announce yesterday that Hobart High School will join our first Multi-School Organisation in 2027, and our second MSO will be established in the north next year.

PUBLIC

Multi-School Organisations are designed to strengthen leadership, support, reduce administrative workload and allow greater focus on teaching, learning and student wellbeing.

We are growing our teaching workforce with \$8.5 million for the Change2Teaching pilot program, which targets mid-career professionals seeking to switch to teaching. There is also \$314 million across four years for infrastructure and to support learning into the future. Our investment in the education portfolio has increased by 76 per cent since 2014. However, we know that funding alone does not guarantee better outcomes, so our focus must shift from the level of investment to how effectively it is used to deliver real outcomes.

Consistent with this, the Budget delivers investment where it can make the biggest difference, while also looking at where and how we can make back-office efficiencies that make sense and support fiscal sustainability. Our priority is and always will be to ensure children and young people are safe, supported, learning and thriving. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Do you have any overview questions, members? Mr Edmunds?

Mr EDMUNDS - You go first this time.

CHAIR - Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I'll run through a couple. These are just ones that I've been asking each of the departments that come in front of us. In a general sense, for the department, around external consultancies used, are you able to give us a detailed breakdown of the total number of external consultancies used in this financial year, 25-26, including any that are still underway and the quantum of the costs against each of those?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I believe we can do that.

Ms WEBB - It may be something that's more efficient to table if you can do it in a paper-based way, just so we don't bleed through -

Ms PALMER - I'll make some opening comments and then I'll pass to the secretary for some comments as well. We have an extremely capable and very large department. But, obviously, there are times when certain areas of expertise doesn't necessarily sit in the department because it isn't necessarily required at all times. But I do believe we have the information that you're seeking, Ms Webb. Secretary?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Thank you. Through you, minister. Just as an overview. Our general consultancy expenses from all funding sources - so this is across the agency - total \$1.5 million for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March, which is a decrease of \$1.3 million or 42 per cent the same period. Our capital investment program-related consultancy expenditure for the same period rose by \$6.1 million to 12.3 million.

That was, obviously, due to the number of capital projects that we have, and then contractor expenditure increased to 26 million, which is driven mainly by the Healthy School Lunch Program and our Lifting Literacy initiative. But our deputy secretary will have more information around that.

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Ms PALMER - Thank you, Kane.

Mr SALTER - I've got the list of consultants over 50,000 for the period 1 July to 31 March. Do you want me to read those out?

Ms WEBB - If it's a large table, I suggest that you might just table it with us instead, if that's possible, because it seems not necessarily good use of our time to read it out.

Mr SALTER - There's about seven on there.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, Kane.

Mr SALTER - The first one, ARL renewal program with the University of South Australia. That was a contract up to the value of 100,000. Decent registered training organisation learning and assessment resource, that was with J A Field and S J Field. That was up to 100,000. Review of community conferences and police cautions, that was with Pathfinders New Zealand, a contract value of 94,000. The next one, workshop facilitation, professional practice uplift, child safety and youth justice services, Paul Nixon, 95,000.

Sector mapping, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Welfare, that was up to 100,000. Air quality assessment with Injury Prevention Services, \$99,380. And consultation program with victim/survivors of youth crime, Relationships Australia, \$95,122.

Ms WEBB - Thank you very much for that. Appreciate it. And in terms of any consultancies planned, looking ahead for the 26-27 financial year and onwards, is this an area that's likely to be the subject of operational efficiencies that you need to meet under the Budget that's laid out for us?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. It would depend on the consultancy and the requirement. Some of them, as Mr Salter's read out, we wouldn't have the expertise in-house to do it and it should be independently led, particularly around commission of inquiry. A number of those would be related to that.

But I think with the number that I read around the 42 per cent reduction last year, I think that's an indication of the department trying to rein in some of that spending and use our internal experts around that. We will be certainly looking at that as part of our budget sustainability program.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I go to another broad area.

CHAIR - Yes. And then we'll go to Mr Edmunds next.

Ms WEBB - Another area that I've just been asking broadly, because there's been quite a bit of focus on it in some departments is around any projects that are focused on IT or digital infrastructure reforms or revamps or new projects. Are there any of those that are in this department that you can outline for us? And I'm particularly interested to hear about whether the project is on time and on budget, and comments you might like to make about that.

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Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. There are a number of projects across the department. Some of them relate to the commission of inquiry, our information management and storage and access, which are on track. In terms of there's a number in the child safety and youth justice space which our Deputy Secretary Children can talk to as well, but Mr Salter's probably got specific information about that.

Ms WEBB - Could he possibly give us a list of - they've probably got names within your department. Could you list those projects for us and what their budgets are?

Mr SALTER - Through you, minister. I think Ginna's mentioned a couple of the key projects, particularly in the education portfolio, the student systems project, which is in the key deliverables. So the status of that project at the moment is that we're at the final stage of evaluating tender responses. So we're on time for that first milestone.

Ms WEBB - Is there a budget for that that's set at the moment?

Mr SALTER - The budget is in the key deliverables.

Ms WEBB - That's one of the ones laid out here?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, that's right. And that's the student and school management - 9 million across forward Estimates.

Ms WEBB - Student and school management system. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Any other IT or digital infrastructure-type projects to list out for me in this space?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The one that I mentioned, the information management, storage and access for the Commission of Inquiry, that has a budget allocation of \$250,000 this year. 365,000 - sorry, last year was 250. Sorry, this year is 250 - 2025-26. 2026-27, 365,000; 2027-28, 1,150,000; and 2028-29, 150,000 as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And at the moment, is that on track and on budget as it's progressing at the moment, that information management one?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, that is.

Mr SALTER - Yes, it is.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr SALTER - Yes. And perhaps another key project is the TRB system replacement.

Ms WEBB - We'll probably go into that in some detail in the line item

Mr SALTER - Yes.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - But just in terms of is it on time and on budget at the present time?

Mr SALTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - What is the total budget for it?

Mr SALTER - Perhaps if we can cover that under the -

Ms WEBB - We can come back on that line item.

Mr SALTER - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

CHAIR - Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, I'm not sure if mine are in overview or in a line item. So perhaps if we do move into line items and they're wrong, we have some levity, if that's okay.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. All right. I'm happy to just get into it, then.

Ms WEBB - Can I just have one more overview?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

CHAIR - We'll just go to Mr Gaffney first.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm not the Chair.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. I'm in the same boat here, but I'm going to play devil's advocate here for a little bit. I know that on 7 May, DECYP proposed, or had, a - really saying that they're looking at a consultation period for a new definition of educational success. And the draft definition reads, 'Education helps me grow and gives me hope for the future. I am connected, capable and confident and ready for what's next'.

So hopefully, a real help, real guide - a guide real change in education. A couple of things that - a couple of comments - I've had people contact me already, as you would expect. They are saying the department's response, by contrast, is to expand the definition of success so that failure becomes invisible. The definition they are using is a sentiment, not a standard, as proposed.

'Tasmania's education system is the worst performing of any Australian state on the most important long-run outcome measure, the proportion of working-age adults with functional literacy and numeracy. This has been true for at least 25 years and has not materially changed. The defining educational success initiative does not address this failure. It proposes to redefine success in terms so broad and so subjective that failure becomes categorically impossible. This

is not education reform. It is the institutional equivalent of moving the goalposts, and the children who most need a functioning school system will bear the consequences for decades'.

The last sentence says, 'The question is not whether Tasmanian children should feel connected, capable and confident. Of course they should. The question is whether the system is actually equipping them to be so, and on that question, the evidence of 25 years gives little comfort'.

So what this person is saying - and is a critic of what's happening - is that by changing the definition, you're changing the goalposts to allow better success for Tasmania's education. So some comment, minister, would be appreciated.

Ms PALMER - Yes, really appreciative to have an opportunity to comment on that. The independent review into education that was done by Vicki Baylis, a wonderful nationally recognised educator, told us that we needed to strengthen Tasmania's understanding of the importance of education and to define educational success in the Tasmanian context.

So the review also told us that we need to recognise and to celebrate all pathways of learning, and rather than just solely focusing on an ATAR score or a TCE. And that's why, as part of our response to that review, we committed to developing a shared and inclusive definition of educational success.

So through the review, it was young people who told us clearly that success is broader than just their grades alone. It's about developing life and social skills, having real choices for the future, growing as individuals, achieving personal goals and contributing meaningfully to their communities.

And we have really reflected on those student voices, and we've drawn on an analysis of work in other jurisdictions, and we are engaged with stakeholders to progress a definition which can be owned by young people, owned by our schools and owned by our community.

So a shared definition of educational success will give our system a common purpose and young people a clear sense that success can look different for different learners and that their aspirations are met. So we're looking at things like: how do we approach TCE, including what do we recognise as part of TCE? It's about how do we measure progress, how do we design and deliver curriculum, how do we support schools and how do we recognise different pathways.

I think one of the things that - and I've spoken about this in the Legislative Council before, and I recall that you've spoken about this before - when we see some of those headlines that say, 'Tasmania at the bottom of the class', where the only way that success in that particular headline is measured is through TCE, well, we have extraordinary young people doing extraordinary things that may not be the right - the TCE may not be the right pathway for them, and that's okay. We want our children to have the opportunity to choose, to be able to switch between, to be able to be celebrated regardless of whether they fit the perfect mould of what one group of maybe, say, academics thinks, 'This is the only way that we're going to measure success'.

One of the most extraordinary events that I go to each year, and the secretary attends it with me, is an event at Government House where the top TCE kids from across Tasmania come

together with one parent each, together with the top VET kids from across Tasmania. And together, they are celebrated as our top 60s - and it's usually 30 from each - top 60 kids. Some of them are absolutely smashing it out of the park in engineering or childcare. Others have reached - had ATAR scores and TCE results that are extraordinary, and we celebrate all of them.

So defining educational success is saying, just because someone says this is their version of success, well, actually, we think there are all different versions of success, and we want to ensure that we have a system that celebrates all those different ways that our young people are achieving and learning.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you. I am very aware of - and I appreciate that - but my question, or the question that's come from here, is how are you going to measure this state against other states and other people? Or are we just going to not do that? Are we just going to broaden the definition, everyone's successful - that's great. I don't mind. I don't think we need to be relative to other states. But how do you measure that success of what you're trying to do?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - You had that as one of the points there. I'm not questioning broadening. How are you going to, say, in 10 years' time or 20 years' time, measure that success?

Ms PALMER - Well, that will lead perfectly into a body of work that I tasked the department to do - I can't quite remember when it's - possibly about a year ago now. And it also came out of the independent review, where Vicki Baylis was saying, the way that you record your data - she had concerns about how we were recording and reporting on the data that comes in, particularly when we are often looking at data and comparing state by state by state. We are not recording the same data as other states, so what I said to the department is we need to look at where are the states; where are the jurisdictions that are very similar to Tasmania; what does their data say.

Let's start looking at ensuring that the data that we're collecting and how we're reporting on it is actually the same measurement as other states and territories are doing, because then instead of every year going, 'Well, we're not comparing apples with apples', which is my line every year, I'm going to be able to say, 'Actually, we are. We are comparing apples with apples because, hypothetically, in South Australia, this how they're recording they're data. We are recording and reporting on the same data'.

Not only is that a fairer system, but I think that also is a great advantage to us, because we'll be able to say, 'You know what, we actually do have a problem over here. We need to be resourcing this area here better, because when we are actually comparing like for like, we can see we've got a problem'.

There's a body of work that sits behind this which is about ensuring that the way we are reporting is actually aligned with how other states and territories are doing it. It's a hard body of work because they're all doing it differently, so we are looking at what jurisdiction is perhaps the closest to us that we can go, 'Okay, let's record this and report on this, like for like'.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Just a follow up to turn that question on its head: if that's our definition of 'success', and to Mr Gaffney's point, what is our definition of 'failure', then? Can someone fail? What is the definition of 'failure'?

Ms PALMER - I feel that's that probably a bit of a personal question for me as minister, and I will probably pass to the secretary for perhaps what her thoughts as the head of this department, but for me, 'failure' is when we can't deliver a system that can adapt to the needs of our young people. It's where we're delivering a system that says, 'You all have to learn this way. This is the only way you can learn: in a classroom, sitting at a desk. That's the only way you can learn'.

To me, that is failure, and when I look at our system and how we deliver education, I am really proud of what we do with a number of tiers across our schools: tier 1, 2, 3, and 4. Tier 4, these are children who can't come to school, and there's a lot of reasons why kids can't come to school, a myriad of complexities around that, but we are still engaging with them.

We are doing everything we can to make sure that up until the age of 18, children don't fall off the radar, and we have programs that actually step up when a child has fallen off the radar, and we go and we find them, and we do everything we can to re-engage them back into learning.

We want our kids to be learning, and we want to be an education system that is flexible enough to say, 'It's okay that you can't cope with this setting. How about this? Does this work for you?' We work with families, and we work with the young people. Your question, what does failure look like: when we can't have a system that is flexible enough to meet the needs of children in where they are at in their learning. Secretary, I don't know if you have a different definition.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I think it's very similar. We need to provide a safe space for all our students to see themselves in and to provide opportunities regardless of your circumstances and your postcode, and if we've done that, then we've succeeded.

For me, too, having that student voice and providing a sense of belonging in a learning setting means that children and young people are going to stay there longer, and they will then understand the importance of a formal education and the need to attain some sort of certificate to prepare them for the world, because the more that they're in school, then the more that they'll see themselves in that.

We're not going to not do some of those other measures or continue to collect those measures. We still will have opportunity to compare ourselves where we need to with other jurisdictions, but many students can't see themselves in that definition.

They don't know, and many families actually don't understand what TCE and ATAR is, and we need to actually show families that value proposition of an education, and it is going to be different for everyone, notwithstanding there are measures that we need to make sure we meet to keep Tasmania where it needs to be. For me, it is really about being able to reach all of our children and young people, regardless of where they are.

Mr HISCUTT - Just to confirm, educational success is measured in opportunity, not in outcome.

Ms WEBSTER - There's a range of measures. I think the answer was what would be a failure, but a failure would be not to provide those opportunities, for me.

Mr HISCUTT - The definition of educational success seems more about opportunity, not about outcomes.

Ms WEBSTER - I think it's both. Through you, minister.

Ms WEBB - Sense of belonging is an outcome.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, absolutely.

Mr HISCUTT - It's a community outcome, not an educational outcome.

Ms PALMER - I think it's important to remember that the work we're doing in defining 'educational success', this is what our children are telling us. This is what our young people are saying: 'I feel successful when'.

Of course, we want to always be encouraging children and to let them know - and I think it was a good term that the secretary used about, regardless of postcode, TCE is a pathway for you; university is a pathway for you; starting VET, that's a pathway for you. It's about the opportunity, and it's about ensuring that we set them up and that we have a system that sets them up that they can make those choices.

I loved that one of the things that came back from our young people was how they contribute to their community. They see that as success, and I actually thought that was beautiful, so we have to make sure that our system is responding to that.

CHAIR - Thank you. On overview?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, it probably is. I'm just trying to figure out where to squeeze some of these in. Is that okay?

Ms PALMER - It's fine with me.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'll just ask them, then.

Ms PALMER - I am yours for 3 hours.

Mr EDMUNDS - Well, eight and a half, I think.

CHAIR - Well, more than that.

Ms PALMER - Well, actually, a lot longer, but in this space on Education.

Mr EDMUNDS - How many teacher vacancies were there at the beginning of Term 1 2025 and Term 1 2026, and how many teachers have been recruited from interstate to fill vacancies?

Ms PALMER - Certainly.

Ms WEBB - That's a line item.

Mr EDMUNDS - In which line item, 1.1? We can move into 1.1, then.

Ms WEBB - I've still got an overview question.

Mr EDMUNDS - Sorry, I didn't realise that.

Ms PALMER - I'm in your hands, Chair.

CHAIR - How about we go with Ms Webb, and we'll come back to you in In School Education?

Ms WEBB - Just a broad one around Closing the Gap and how we're tracking in this department on Closing the Gap priorities and outcomes: can you identify your responsibilities there and how that's progressing?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. I will pass to the secretary for some more detail on that, and I'll also invite Jodee Wilson to the table. Jodee is the Deputy Secretary, Development and Support. Here she is.

As a government, we are committed to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student has a learning plan that is developed in partnership with their family and teachers, and these learning plans allow for tailored goals to be developed to meet the needs of each child and young person. Whilst we still have work to do, it is worth noting that NAPLAN results for Tasmanian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all year levels show a smaller gap to their non-Aboriginal peers than Australia.

ROGS data shows Tasmania has continued to improve its attendance rate since 2022 and that attendance rates for Indigenous students in Tasmanian government schools are amongst the highest of all states and territories, and they are above the national average.

Tasmania has also one of the smallest attendance gaps, as noted in the Closing the Gap annual data compilation report of July 2025. DECYP's Aboriginal Education Services work to build a deeper understanding and a respect for Tasmanian Aboriginal history and living culture in schools, child and family learning centres, and in our libraries as well. With that, I might pass to Ms Wilson.

Ms WILSON - Thank you, minister. Just to add to the data that you've provided, the Closing the Gap target states that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should achieve their full learning potential, and we are, through our Aboriginal Education Services, looking to identify the opportunities that can be provided so that our Aboriginal people are known, well, safe, and learning.

Over the last number of years, we have undertaken a review into the way in which the services are delivered for Aboriginal students, seeking to address areas such as getting to

school, having the resources that they need to participate in activities at school so that they are able to be accessing the learning opportunities to their potential.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. In that review, can I ask, minister, for a bit more information about that? Was that sort of an internally-conducted review, and did it conclude at a certain point and have a series of recommendations to then implement that we're now doing, or how is that structures?

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. The review was internal, and it worked with those Aboriginal employees who work directly with Aboriginal children and young people. And from that we identified that there were opportunities for us to get better connection to the work that our Aboriginal education workers were doing, were undertaking within their communities.

It led to a more refined data analysis on where Aboriginal educational workers were being placed and the work that they were doing. We continue to refine the implementation plan on the basis of that review in order that we're continuing to ensure that those aspects of Closing the Gap are being addressed.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. It sounds like there's positive results and we're doing quite well on some of that data.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it is really exciting. Just with your indulgence, Chair, Aboriginal Education Services actually developed a culturally safe online resource that was aligned with the Australian curriculum and guided and reviewed by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. It's called The Orb, and this resource provides teachers and students with local historical and cultural information.

Also in 2026 there were new learning resources were developed with Tasmanian Aboriginal people to complement the curriculum deep time content. That was following a successful pilot at Brighton High School. These new resources will be available for all our schools in 2027.

Also just finally, as part of our Lifting Literacy initiative, which I hope we get to talk about a little bit later, the book 'Here on Sea Country' was written and illustrated by Tasmanian Aboriginal children, young people and adults along with an English curriculum unit based on the text, and it was distributed for use in all Tasmanian government year 3 classes. There's some really beautiful work happening in this space.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I think it's good to get that on the record.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - Thank you.

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In School Education

CHAIR - If we have no further Overview questions, we'll first go to Mr Hiscutt to start off questioning and then to Mr Edmunds.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Minister, the Budget refers to operational efficiencies in Education, Children and Young People, including a 10 per cent reduction in back office functions, reportedly around 150 roles in the first year, and substantially more across the forward Estimates. Can you specify exactly which functions are being reduced, how many positions are affected each year over the forwards and what assurances you can provide that these so-called back office reductions will not diminish support to schools, vulnerable children or frontline service delivery?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. It is not lost on me as minister, nor is it lost on my secretary, the huge amount of work that is in front of us, and it is not easy work. We have tried to be very upfront and very transparent in naming up the number of positions that we are looking at, around that 150.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, I appreciate that.

Ms PALMER - My expectation is, and I have no doubt, that this will be the approach of this department and of this secretary is to do what needs to be done in a really sensitive and appropriate way. But we know that, you know, this is work that does need to be done. There has been extraordinary growth in this department, much of it in frontline services, where we've seen, you know, more than 900 additional teacher assistants in our schools, over 400 more teachers in our schools.

But we've been very clear that we are not looking at frontline services. It is, you know, looking to streamline that corporate and back office function by around that 10 per cent. The operational efficiencies will set the department on a pathway to sustainability and enable us to continue to prioritise investment in the people and services working directly with children and families. With those few comments, I'll pass to our secretary, who will be able to give you more detail for your question.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Excuse me. Thank you. Through you, minister. I think the key for us, there are no decisions at all that have been made. I think the key is that we want to look at our services around, you know, avoiding duplication, increasing the efficiency of our systems and how they can - you know, if there's any misalignment of service delivery.

I think I mentioned yesterday the agency has been one, now, for a few years, so it's an opportunity to look at how we've worked through that bringing education and children and young people together, and are there any opportunities where we can actually streamline some of the work that we're doing and actually making it more efficient for those people that are dealing directly with children and young people to get the service delivery that they need. I think we will also look at the design of our services, the structure of the agency. But we want to stay the course on our key reforms around education and children and young people.

I do want to acknowledge, though, that I understand there's a level of uncertainty of people that are in what we would call support roles for the frontline. Everyone is doing a great job. Everyone's job and work is valuable. It's how we can redesign our services to make sure that we can be financially sustainable and meet the budget operational efficiencies that we've been given.

I think it's really important to acknowledge that the work that we'll do in the next couple of months is around voluntary redundancies. Someone might put their hand up; it doesn't mean to say that that will be accepted, because the work that they're doing, they might be working in an area that's the only area that's doing that work and, you know, the work that they're doing is, you know, key person-dependent, to use that work, I suppose, and we have to assess it against the whole of the agency and to look at what we've got. If someone puts their hand up in one area, it might mean that someone else can go into that role, they've got the skills to go in that role and fill it.

So there's a lot of work to do, and I don't want to speculate, because I think there is a bit of uncertainty within the department around that. I'll be meeting with our departmental leadership group in the next couple of weeks. We'll work through that. We've already got communication and key messages out there for those leaders, and then we'll be taking those messages and working with our staff, and I've got meetings that will be set up with the unions as well around that.

There'll be a consultative approach to all of that. But I acknowledge that it is going to be difficult in terms of that uncertainty, and also you might be working along someone today who puts their hand up for a voluntary redundancy. That's accepted, and then what does that mean for you? Those are the things that we really carefully need to work through and we need to acknowledge that, you know, there are humans behind this as well, so I'm really sensitive to that.

Mr HISCUTT - I put on the record acknowledging the fact that at least your department has, you know, named it up, where a lot of other departments have hidden behind that number. I'll ask a Montgomery-specific question, then come back to some others. But there's now a defunct site in Penguin where the old Penguin primary school, my old school, is now no longer used.

Central Coast Council decided a number of months ago that it was excess to them and could not take it on when they were offered. Could I please be provided with an update on what the current thinking with this site is, and a continued assurance that any decision will ensure the consideration of the fact that the outside school hours care is currently provided at that site?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. Penguin primary and high school students commenced the 2023 school year at a new school campus. It's pretty spectacular. I was very excited to be asked to open the new school in September 24. Both the department and I have been in discussions with key stakeholders about the future of the site.

I've been personally and met and engaged so that I could hear directly from the key stakeholders of that site, and there have been a number of contacts with the department as well. They have also, you know, sought to have really deep engagements with those stakeholders. These discussions have included the Penguin District School principal, the school association, and as you mentioned, a number of discussions with the Central Coast Council as well.

Following the decision by the council to decline an offer to take over the former primary school, the department is investigating what the future of the site might look like, and we will continue to engage with the council as a stakeholder with the Penguin District School and other key stakeholders as part of that process. My expectation remains that a decision as to the next steps of this site will be made by 30 June 2026, and we are committed to supporting vibrant

Tasmanian communities and ensuring that all facilities are put to their best use. So very aware of the differing opinions amongst the key stakeholders of what they would or wouldn't like to see with that building.

So we are working our way through that. I've made that commitment to have a decision by then, but as with everything we do, it's always about what are the best outcomes for our young people. And I'm certainly very aware of the need for out-of-school hours care for Penguin, and that is obviously at the front of my thinking as well.

Mr HISCUTT - Appreciate that. And just while we're on there, an unscripted question, but as you said, Penguin District School opened 2023 with expanded campus. I understand there's a bit of a dispute in understanding whether that school is at capacity or not. It's said that all the classrooms are full, but it's not at capacity because there are spaces in - shared learning spaces which obviously can't be used concurrently.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Do you have any commentary to make, because I know that there's many age groups where they're no longer accepting any out-of-area enrolments because they're already above capacity and still have potentially more in-area enrolments to come.

Ms PALMER - Yeah, for sure. I'll attempt to answer the question, but if there's a need to step in, you save me. So in 2018, that's when the commitment was made, the \$20 million commitment to redevelop the school. When a public works submission for the project was lodged, the capacity of the school was expected to be 725 students.

However, after receiving a positive outcome from the construction tender process, additional building works were actually able to be undertaken. And these additional works increased the school's capacity from 725 students to 925 students.

So capacity is calculated using a standard that is a nationally applied formula, which involves multiplying the number of learning areas by the average class size of 25 students. So what I'm advised is that Penguin District School is not identified as at capacity or nearing capacity school.

Schools can, however, have year groups that are identified as being at capacity or nearing capacity, as in just that year group. In these cases, the department works with the school to identify what options might be available.

So I'm advised that DECYP is in discussion with Penguin District School regarding at capacity year groups and that they are exploring options. But overall, Penguin District School has adequate enrolment capacity. But should additional capacity be required into the future, the department would certainly look to accommodate that. Can I just check if there's anything further.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. And I'll just clarify the question as well, before you go to that as well. Does that mean that the definition of 'capacity' includes, at one time, all of the classrooms, all of the art rooms, all of the music rooms, all of the subsidiary rooms all being filled, and that counts towards the total capacity, as in there's no room for movement between those spaces?

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Ms PALMER - I might hand to the department. Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Mr SALTER - Through you, minister. Just on that, the first part of the question, to emphasise that, yes, there's been ongoing collaboration with the school via facilities and learning services as to how they can maximise space.

So that has been ongoing. In terms of the capacity calculation, broadly, what you've described is correct, but we don't look to get schools to 100 per cent capacity and then start to be thinking about it. So there's a trigger point of 85 per cent, so what does it look like, and that's when we get actively involved.

Mr HISCUTT - I guess, at this point, every classroom is full, but not every space is full, is how I would describe Penguin at the moment, but that may be disputed. Thank you. I've got other questions, but if perhaps others want to -

CHAIR - No. If I go to -

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for those, minister.

CHAIR - Mr Edmunds, are you ready for your question?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, sure. Just the same question I asked before. How many teacher vacancies were there at the beginning of term 1, 2025, and term 1, 2026, and how many teachers have been recruited from interstate to fill vacancies?

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much for the question. I'll pass to my secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. So in January 2025, there were 26 FTE statewide teacher vacancies.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - In January 2026, there are 11.2 statewide teacher vacancies. And we're just getting that information around interstate, so we'll have that for you during the hearing.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. No dramas. I'll just keep going, if that's all right. How many schools purchased additional teachers and support staff above their staffing allocation using their school resourcing package in each year, in 25 and 26?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I'll make some opening comments, but I will ask Deputy Secretary for Schools and Early Years, Trudy Pearce, to join us at the table. And just while Ms Pearce is making her way to the table, you know, one of the things that we - oh, she's up there.

One of the things, of course, in the way that our schools are set up is that, you know, a lot of these decisions are taken by principals. They have their school resourcing allocation. And then, they will often look and say, well, what I need for my school in this particular year could be an influx of kindergarten students. It could be, as we were just talking, a year group that

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might be at capacity. So it is something that is for our principals to manage and make those decisions about where they would like to invest the money that they have.

Mr EDMUNDS - But there is still some departmental oversight of that, isn't there? Because I remember on the eastern shore some schools had done that last year and then teachers were moved mid-year.

Ms PALMER - For those details I'll hand to Ms Pearce. Thank you.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Thanks.

Ms PEARCE - Sorry, can I just confirm the question was how many schools?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, how many schools purchased additional teachers and support staff above their staffing allocation using their school resourcing package in each year, 25, 26?

Ms PEARCE - That would vary, and we would have a record of it through salaries that are paid, however, that would vary throughout the year. So schools do have the flexibility, in the event they choose to run an art program for terms 2 and 3, they may - and there's an art specialist that they can recruit for a short-term vacancy, they will do that.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms PEARCE - So that does vary throughout the year. And there is flexibility in relation to their school resource package.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms PEARCE - We provide them with staff through their approved establishment and so that is centrally funded and centrally resourced, and then the flexibility is in relation to working with their communities around specialisations and the additional staffing.

Mr EDMUNDS - And so that's centrally tracked as well?

Ms PEARCE - The staffing would be - the funding would be advised.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Mr SALTER - Through you, minister. So we've got figures at a total level, not by school.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, yes.

Mr SALTER - I think as the Minister and Trudy have outlined that schools have autonomy in terms of the cash that they've provided.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Understood.

Mr SALTER - A good example of that being educational adjustments funding that flows, which often gets used for teacher assistant support. So at the pay period of 25 March,

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the number of teaching FTE through the school resource package was 508. And the non-teaching FTE, which would predominantly be teacher assistants, was 2055.

Mr EDMUNDS - So that's this - sorry, what was that date again, sorry?

Mr SALTER - March 26.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. And do we have for the previous year?

Mr SALTER - Yes, for March 25, the teaching FTE was 774, and the non-teaching FTE was 1894. I would make the comment, though, in terms of the teaching FTE, some of those were changed to go to the approved establishment rather than being in the school resource package, and part of the reasoning for that was to make it simpler for schools as well. It's easier just to manage through approved establishment rather than the cash allocation.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. And that non-teaching number, does that swing quite a lot every year, or is there a specific reason why it's so different for those two years?

Mr SALTER - Again, through you, minister. Again, for educational adjustments, the model continues to see additional students moderated with significant dollars flowing through with that, and then - -

Mr EDMUNDS - Is this accounted for elsewhere? Is that a simple way to explain that?

Mr SALTER - You say accounted for elsewhere -

Mr EDMUNDS - As in like, those numbers look different for this question, but that's because those FTEs might be living somewhere else, in different years.

Mr SALTER - No. It's actually additional numbers in schools, because they've got additional funds, particularly for educational adjustments, to support the students as they've been moderated for their specific needs.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Does that mean there's an extra 750 non-teaching FTEs across the state in the past 12 months?

Mr SALTER - I'm not sure -

Ms PALMER - Sorry, what was your question?

Mr EDMUNDS - Based on what I understand the answer, the non-teaching number was two and a half thousand, essentially.

Mr SALTER - No. 2,055, sorry.

Mr EDMUNDS - 2055, sorry. I had 255 for that. Okay. Thank you. Appreciate that. I'm interested in what the Budget contains in regards to funding models for students with additional requirements. I've been speaking to a couple of local parents from my electorate, one of whom has had to allocate their son's NDIS funds to teaching staff for things like manual handling, speech pathology and communication access, even in classroom settings.

Their opinion is that teaching staff need to be equipped to accommodate students with additional needs in mainstream classes, and it doesn't seem training in this regards is currently adequate for these parent.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you very much for the question. When it comes to educational adjustments disability funding, that began in 2020, and it recognises 11,551 students with a disability in Tasmanian government schools. And of these, 9,954 students attract additional school funding through the School Resource Package to contribute to the educational adjustments schools need to make as part of a student's learning plan.

It's an extraordinary amount of money that has grown year on year on year, and I believe it's \$182 million is what will be invested in 2026 for those educational adjustments. And this is quite an extraordinary amount of money that we do put into SRPs so that schools are able to make those decisions about what do they need, and you can imagine that it can change year on year with new people with different complexities. Ad so schools actually are the ones who give us the information to enable us to make those decisions.

Sometimes it can be used - it might be for a capital - an infrastructure spend. Quite often it's for teacher assistance, to have more support in that space. Does that answer your question?

Mr EDMUNDS - To an extent. Yes. Thanks. Sorry.

Mr SALTER - I just want to add, through you, minister, just in terms of the growth of those funds. The 182 million includes direct educational adjustments into SRPs and staffing, it also includes funding for the support schools Early Childhood Inclusion Service (ECIS). But since 2022 that funding has grown from 98 million to 182 million, so there's been a significant investment over that time.

Ms PALMER - Yes. And I think you were also talking about training as well.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Based off the feedback from - yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Probably a couple of things here. One of the bodies of work that we've done with the University of Tasmania, which was another recommendation that came from the independent education review, to actually look at is the way the teaching qualifications that were being delivered by the university, were they for teaching in 2026 and beyond? The university has been absolutely brilliant in really coming to the table, challenging itself, working closely with the department to ensure that the way that they are training our future teachers is actually fit for purpose.

And part of that is about the fact that our schools are so inclusive, and we invest millions into ensuring that they can be inclusive. But those new, early-year teachers, it's really making sure that they have an understanding of some of the complexities that they will see in a classroom with our little people. I think that's really setting up our future workforce to be able to hit the ground on day 1 with greater understandings about some of the complexities that we see in schools, and the fact that our schools are inclusive and that's the way we want them to be.

One of the other things that we've had a real focus on, and whilst the title of this action plan is not what I'm talking about and wanting to associate that with children with disabilities, but our Violence in Schools Action Plan. One of the areas that we've had a real focus on there is the training of our teacher assistants, because quite often it is our teacher assistants who are the ones that work really closely with some kids that have complex needs that can be behavioural but that can also be kids' disability.

And so really ensuring that they are having that professional learning and really feeding into them professionally about how to sense when there's - what are the triggers for escalating behaviour, what are some of the signs, what can you do in that moment to bring a situation back down. And I think that the training which has already commenced - I think they've already had -

Ms WEBSTER - Tomorrow is the first training for teacher assistants.

Ms PALMER - There you go. Tomorrow. I think that's going to make a big difference in giving confidence to our teacher assistants, but also to help them to help our teachers as well. But also the difference it will make to the lives of some of our young people who, through not fault of their own, their behaviour does escalate. And if a teacher assisting can go, 'I've learned about that. I know what to do. I'm going to try this strategy,' we really are hoping and believing that the investment that we've made in that area will really help with how classrooms run.

Mr EDMUNDS - Totally agree. The TAs probably get it more than the people managing them, certainly in my experience. And to that point, you talk about ingraining a new sense of how to operate through graduates and through the university.

And, perhaps, this is better for the department question. What work's being done to ensure that attitudes are moving with the times with, perhaps, previous generations of people who are now in charge of where - as we've just talked about, where resources are going both within schools and within the department to ensure their attitudes are contemporary, as well, and reflect what you've been talking about.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll pass to the department about that. But I'm a glass half full kind of girl, and I would like to think that the attitude across community, socially, right across the broad spectrum has changed towards disability.

Mr EDMUNDS - But works going into it, I suppose.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Absolutely.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. I agree with you. Yes.

Ms PALMER - And also, I think, with disability had on as well, that's' one of the things that we really focused on with the legislation that our House put through. The disability safeguarding legislation where it's now a requirement for all departments and our GBEs, all defined entities, to actually have the disability inclusion plan.

And this department is held to account through that legislation, as well, and reporting to the disability commissioner wherever there's big policy reform. How have you factored in the needs of people with disability, children with disability.

I think that's one of the wonderful things that we saw come through that fantastic piece of legislation is that, as a government, as a society we are saying to all those defined entities, which is inclusive of this department, you will be held to account for how you actually include children and workers and your entire department, how you approach inclusivity, and your cultural thinking around people with disability. But I will pass to the department for further detail.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Thank you. Through you, minister. There's a few things that we're doing in that space. One of them, the independent education review clearly said that the initial teacher training needed to be very contemporary, and we're working with the university around that, and one of our deputy secretaries is leading that work. But that is very much about contemporising the initial teacher training, making sure that teachers are classroom ready when they get into the workplace.

There's a couple of other things; the teacher intern placement program, which supports final-year UTAS students to obtain permanent employment with the department. We had 17 interns from the 21 who commenced in 2025 secure jobs as teachers, so I think that is ensuring that there is an opportunity for them to work in our schools before they're formally placed.

The other program that I like to talk about is the Change to Teaching program, which next year will attract up to 40 mid-year career professionals to transition into teaching as a teaching career next year. That program has been developed in partnership with the university, and that will ensure that if you might be - you might have worked in disability, for example, or you might've worked as an engineer or carpenter or whatever it might be, but someone can actually transition or change their university degree into teaching, so something that's really exciting that will commence in 2027.

We have a four-day first-year teacher induction program, both in the north and south of Tasmania, and in January this year we had 121 new departmental teachers attending that structured in-person learning session with a full-day teacher mentor at their school.

There's work across the board, but I think initially the work that we're doing with UTAS around initial teacher training and really getting an agreement with them about what our expectations are of teachers and also what might need to change with their program, but also how we might place teachers when they come into our system to make sure that they get a soft landing when they come into the organisation so they are mentored, and all the work that we're doing to try and free up our more senior teachers and principles to work with those early career teachers is really important.

Ms PALMER - Really important.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr EDMUNDS - A matter for you, sir.

CHAIR - Yes. Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. This one's a Budget question. In November's 2025-26 Budget, the forward Estimate for 2026-27 in school education funding was 1.377 billion, but

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what's happened in the 2026-27, this Budget, it's deducted, or there's been a \$21 million drop in that, and it looks like that's consistent across the forward Estimates. I'm just wondering what happened since November to now for there to be a \$21 million decrease in funding for 2026-27?

Ms PALMER - Thank you. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr SALTER - Through you, minister. The operational efficiencies that came into this year's Budget have been notionally allocated on a proportional basis across outputs until it's determined where the savings will actually be realised from. For 2026-27 the amount that was applied against output 1.1 was 20.8 million, so that's the main reason for the change from the last Budget.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's fine. The next lot of questions are to do with year 11 and 12, which I've done before, and I've given some of those questions to your staff at the back so they've got them ready to answer, because there's a number of them. The first one is, what are the median enrolment numbers of both year 11 and year 12 students in our extended high schools?

Ms PALMER - We'll get that one for you.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. Yes. Trudy's coming up. Okay. And I'll wait till Trudy gets here.

CHAIR - Do you want to sit up this end near the minister, Trudy?

Ms PEARCE - I don't mind. Sorry.

Mr GAFFNEY - The first one, what are the median enrolment numbers of both year 11 and year 12 students in our extended high schools?

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister. The median enrolment numbers at census 1 2026 in extension high schools, as you've named: year 11, six students, and year 12, six students.

Mr GAFFNEY - As of today, how many high schools, if you can do it, have five or fewer year 11 and 12 students and how many have none at all?

Ms PEARCE - I can provide you with those numbers as of today. I do have the 2026 year 1 census figures.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, that's fine.

Ms PEARCE - The high schools between one and five students in years 11 and 12 from census 1 was 11 schools, and high schools with no year 11 and 12 students from census 1 2026 data was six schools.

Mr GAFFNEY - What are the TCE and ATAR achievements rates for year 11 and 12 students enrolled in high schools?

Ms PEARCE - We don't have the 2025 attainment data.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

Ms PEARCE - That's released to schools but not centrally at this point.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

Ms PEARCE - The 2024 is still the most recent TCE attainment data available. I can provide you with the 2024.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms PEARCE - Across all government schools, excluding colleges, 57 per cent of year 12 students attained a TCE, up from 47 per cent in 2023.

Mr GAFFNEY - What are the attendance rates for year 11 and 12 in high schools?

Ms PEARCE - I believe we can have that data. I'm not certain whether that data has come through, through you, minister.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

Ms PALMER - We'll have it in this session.

Mr GAFFNEY - What are the year 11 and 12 enrolment numbers for the individual high schools that are within, say, 30 kilometres of a college?

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister. We have that data and it will be provided.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. Here's my point, Trudy. I note - through you, minister, sorry.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - I note the Treasurer's focus on operational efficiencies and what must be getting close to, I'm considering, \$200 million being spent in year 11 and 12. That's seeking in terms of capital costs of adapting buildings since 2014, year 11 and 12 staff in high schools, decent back office costs and additional costs to colleges.

When will there be a review of the viability of having year 11 and 12 in every high school, especially when many of them have - or six of them, as we just heard - have very few year 11 and 12 enrolments or none at all? Is there a review of that decision of 2014?

Ms PALMER - If you would give me some flexibility to answer this question. One of the things I think we have to be really careful of is that we're not doing policy by numbers, because when you look at some of the schools that will fall into that category of having less than five participants, and indeed, some who are actually within - you know, I think you mentioned a 30-kilometre radius or outer, the percentage of young people who are actually participating is quite high. We do have to be careful that we're not capturing schools where the percentage is actually really high.

So I give you an example. One of the schools that would fall into that category of less than five is the Southern Support School. I think that is 71 per cent of the students that were in year 10 in 2025 who went on to year 11. That's going to fall into that category of five or less, but it's actually 71 per cent of their cohort.

Then you have other examples like Rosebery District School. It was actually 16 per cent of their cohort that chose to remain. Campbell Town, 14 per cent. Campania, 16 per cent. We can't just sort of have - we have to look at this really carefully, because for some of those schools it's actually quite a big percentage of the cohort of students that are choosing to remain, because that's where they want to be.

I understand that, you know, this has been quite a topic, and I have to say that direct retention from year 10 to 12 in government schools actually increased by almost 2 per cent between 2003 and 2005, which was in line with our government's targets. In 2025 we saw nearly 14 per cent of our senior secondary student cohorts by headcount opting to study at one of our extension schools, so that's over 1000 young people who, without this option, they may not have remained in school beyond year 10. This was the choice that they made. In 2023 50 per cent of prospective year 11 students lived within 2 kilometres of a government school offering - sorry, offering senior secondary, and 85 per cent within 10 kilometres. That's up from 2015 when only 20 per cent lived within 2 kilometres and only 67 per cent within 10 kilometres.

We also often hear, especially when I'm visiting schools, that children might opt at year 10 to go to college, and then they find for various reasons, 'I can't cope, I'm not going to keep learning', and so they actually choose to go back to their schools.

And that's very much part of ensuring that when a child might feel those - could be a level of anxiety, for whatever that reason might be - that the school is ready, the school can respond so that we don't lose that child who says, 'I can't cope, this is the only way to do years 11 and 12 in this big and exciting environment of college. I can't do that', then there is a safe place for them to land.

And, again, the voice of our students - I've got one example here - there are smaller student numbers, I get more one-on-one time. You continue to study with family around you - familiar people, sorry, around you - and I was anxious about going to college because of the larger size, and I feel comfortable talking with people at my school if I had issues and I wouldn't do that if I was at college.

And then some of the more obvious ones, I don't have to travel an hour every day to get to school. So we want to ensure that, even if children make that step into college and it's not for them, that we are ready to respond to that, that we're not going to leave them behind.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you, minister. I'm pleased that you said that you will look carefully at this. So that means I'm assuming that the government has funded a school resourcing review and delivery initiative. So the terms of reference will include an assessment of the financial efficiency and educational effectiveness of year 11 and 12 delivery models, particularly with very small cohorts.

Ms PALMER - Are you referring to the school resourcing package review?

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Mr GAFFNEY - Review and delivery initiative.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. And so that will include an assessment of the effectiveness of year 11 and 12 as one of the terms of reference?

Ms PALMER - We're working through the terms of reference now.

Mr GAFFNEY - And so I'm assuming that the year 11 and 12 will be a terms of reference to see whether the model that was introduced by the Liberal Government in 2014 is actually being effective, as you would do any 10-year-old model of delivery. And I'm not against a lot of what you've said. It makes sense.

But you would have to measure that effectiveness of that decision that was made in 2014. The ones at the support school could come out - definitely need to stay, but the one where there's a school one kilometre from the college and there are three kids going there, is that an effective use of resources when you're taking \$21 million of operational efficiencies across the board?

So it's fine for students to have one-on-one, but if down the road at the college they've got somebody teaching one of the subjects that is not trained and there's 30 kids in that class, then you have to weigh that up. So I'm assuming that there will be an evaluation of the year 11 and 12 model, which would seem to make sense.

Ms PALMER - As I say, we're working through the terms of reference.

Mr GAFFNEY - Working through the terms of reference. Okay.

Ms WEBB - Can I have a follow up?

CHAIR - A follow up?

Ms WEBB - Yes.

CHAIR - Sure.

Ms WEBB - So I'm interested. That terms of reference for that school resource package review is one thing. Is that the appropriate place that you would have a review of the model, or would it be more appropriate to review that differently?

Ms PALMER - Sorry, I think we're actually talking about two different - I think I'm talking about a review that might be different to what you're talking about.

Ms WEBB - Yes. So I think I'm following up on that a bit, because I think what Mr Gaffney was asking about was, will the policy that's now been implemented for 10 years to extend high school to year 12, will that be reviewed, and if so, how is that going to happen in the next, near future?

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Ms PALMER - Okay. Can I just get the secretary to clarify where I've got muddled here. Sorry, I was thinking about a different review, which is about the SRP.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. So through you, minister. I think, Mr Gaffney, you're talking about the school resourcing review and delivery initiative that's referenced in the Budget chapter, which is a review of our baseline funding to ensure equitable distribution.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - So the terms of reference don't explicitly cover financial efficiency and educational effectiveness of year 11 and 12. It's actually for all schools, ensuring equitable allocation of baseline funding and FTE funding. And that's work that Mr Salter will lead. I think minister was - don't want to speak for the minister - but perhaps referring for the financial sustainability analysis.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry to just clarify.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - But on that, then, Mr Gaffney's point stands and it's a good one, well made. This is a policy that's been in place and implemented over a 10-year period. It does take a significant amount of resourcing. We're in a budget that's requiring us to look at operational efficiencies of great magnitude.

So what's being done to review that policy for the extension of high schools? And for the record, I'm a big supporter of extending high schools in rural and regional areas. I think ones that are within a distance to colleges should absolutely not be done, because that would be my assertion.

Ms PALMER - Unless it's something like the support school, which is different.

Ms WEBB - Unless it's a support school. So that's a different thing. But otherwise, why on earth would we be setting up every school to have year 11 and 12 when they're in spitting distance of a college and colleges are excellent? So that's just my personal comment, but in terms of review, is there an intention to review given operational efficiencies?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Yes, if I could just address the personal comment that you made. I think one of the intentions of this particular policy position was, regardless of your postcode, it's removing any barrier to continue on. We want to see the number of kids who are going on to years 11 and 12 on the up, and it's about removing any barrier, regardless of where you might live and regardless of what your circumstances might be.

Even if you're living within five kilometres of a college, there could still be certain barriers to you going on to college. So we're wanting to make sure we're removing any barrier that there could be around that. So we do remain really committed to the intent of that and to ensuring that, wherever we can see that there could potentially be a barrier, we're working to remove that. Regardless of where a child might live, regardless of what their postcode might be.

Ms WEBB - That's a great principle, but we've also got other principles we try and live up to with schools too, and we've got a limited resource which is getting smaller every year. So the only way we can balance how we're fulfilling that principle against the other important principles we're trying to fulfil here in our education system is to review it. So what's happening with the review?

Ms PALMER - So this policy is not under review, and at the moment I have no intention of having a formal review around this because, as I say, we are trying to ensure that there are no barriers to any child anywhere gaining - having the option and the choice to go through to year 11 and 12. But there is going to be this body of work that is done through the financial sustainability analysis, which will be looking right across the board.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Appreciate that. And I have a follow up, and then you have the next question as well, Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. And just to confirm the numbers, was the total number of students in extension schools around 1000? Is that what you said? I thought I heard previously.

Ms PALMER - Yes, yes. Hang on.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. So the total cost for extension schools, I thought I heard the number 200 million?

Mr GAFFNEY - No, that was an assessment of me. Not from the government.

Ms PALMER - I don't think I said that.

Mr GAFFNEY - That was just a ballpark figure.

Mr HISCUTT - Is there a number of the total cost of extension schools per year?

Ms PALMER - Yes. So just to clarify, in 2025 we saw nearly 14 per cent of our senior secondary student cohort by headcount opting to study at one of our extension schools. So that was 14 per cent. And that's over 1000 individual young people.

Mr HISCUTT - So say it's around a thousand.

Ms PALMER - And we have the 26 figures as well. Thank you.

Mr SALTER - That was total funding for - - -

Mr HISCUTT - For extension schools.

Mr SALTER - Yes. So total funding is 22.6 million, and that's got two components. There's specific program funding which is 13.8 million and then you've got standard enrolment-based funding which is 8.8 million.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

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Ms WEBB - So can you break that down?

Mr HISCUTT - So just put in a point, it's \$22,000 per student.

Ms WEBB - Can you break it down, the funding for it, for the rural and remote schools that are being funded and for the urban schools that are within distance to colleges, or not?

Mr SALTER - We would have that level of - - -

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice. Okay. I think that's something we can get for you during this session. And when I get it, I'll - - -

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And just to clarify, the figures you gave there, the second figure you gave, I think, which was the 9 million or so - - -

CHAIR - 8.8.

Ms WEBB - 8.8. Is that funding that would attach to kids who - and it would be wherever they went to school, that funding would go with them.

Mr SALTER - Correct. Yes.

Ms WEBB - So the first figure you gave, the 13 million or so, I think, is the actual specific for the extension program in the schools.

Mr SALTER - Yes. Specific program funding. Correct. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Back to Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Okay. Thank you. I wanted to just talk a bit about workers compensation in this department, and what allowances have the department made for workers' compensation, and how has that number changed over the last 5 years?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. I believe we have all of that information at the table for you, so I'll pass to our secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. Can I just confirm you're after the budget allocation or the numbers of workers on workers' -

Mr HISCUTT - No, the budget allocation.

Ms WEBSTER - The budget allocation in terms of workers' compensation premiums is what we're talking about?

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. That's the word, sorry, I meant to talk about, yes.

Ms WEBSTER - The data for year 2021-22 was \$14,982,373; 2022-23, \$18,400,000.

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Mr HISCUTT - Just to the million is fine. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - 2023-24, \$19,800,000; and in 2024-25, \$24,700,000.

Mr HISCUTT - That's radical, but not as radical as some other departments.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, there has been an increase. Through you, minister. A number of the things that we're focusing on is how we can make sure that we've got our workers at work and they don't get injured in the first place. That's our aim. We've got a number of programs around staff wellbeing and support, specifically in this portfolio, a staff wellbeing program in a number of schools. We have a manager and three psychologists, one in each region, working specifically with around 20 schools.

We also have our Violence in Schools Action Plan around how we're supporting our school staff to actually manage some of those really complex matters, and we now have Wellbeing Connect, which is our new health and wellbeing service, which is funded at about just over a million dollars per year, around counselling and support for workers who are injured at work. This is a key area of focus for the department.

Mr HISCUTT - I just was going to follow up my own question. I'm not sure whether you had a -

Mr EDMUNDS - No, after you. I've got follow up on that, too.

Mr HISCUTT - It was just to see what the percentage difference between musculoskeletal for the last financial year or the last number you have.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, absolutely. In terms of the financial year to 30 June 2025, physical injuries were 456 claims received; and psychological injuries, 149 received. That's a total of 605. In 2023-24, physical injuries were 433; psychological injuries, 140; at a total of 573.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I was going to move on to Violence in Schools. Did you have a follow up?

Mr EDMUNDS - Do you mind? I've just got a couple, if that's okay.

CHAIR - We'll go to Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm just interested in what return to work supports are in place for teachers who are yet to return to workplaces due to psychosocial impacts caused by violence in their workplace.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. In terms of the workers' compensation approach, there are a number of things. As I said, we've got Wellbeing Connect, where there's a number of counselling sessions.

We also have our school wellbeing support unit who actually is focused on going out to the schools and being in the schools. If there's an incident, for example, it would be a debrief on the incident, and the aim would be to make sure that the support is provided so that people don't feel like they can't come to work the next day. That's really one of our key supports.

The other thing around Violence in Schools, the action plan around violence in schools, is we have a number of targeted areas around training and support. One of the things that we're focusing on in that is what policies and procedures do we need to provide at a system level to better support schools for those more unusual and out-of-the-norm incidents that happen.

Certainly, when I visited schools, our principals and our teachers are very good at managing those incidences that are usual in schools that happen from time to time, but when it's an incident that's ongoing or more significant, there's more support that we can provide from a system level.

Mr EDMUNDS - How effective are you finding those supports that you have in place, or how effective are you finding them to be?

Ms WEBSTER - At the moment, certainly, the advice around the support and wellbeing program for those schools that we have is very strong support. We want to do a formal evaluation of that, though, and make sure that what we're doing is the right thing. Violence in Schools, I think it's certainly a bit too early to tell.

Again, we'd want to evaluate how that went over time, but the ultimate aim is that we want those numbers to drop. We want the numbers of our staff that are affected to drop. We want them to keep reporting incidents.

I think the other thing is, too, that we're looking at trying to separate some of those incidents where, at the moment, everything's reported under a particular heading of 'verbal assault', 'physical assault', and those sorts of things.

What we try to do is try to separate that so we can better understand some of the causes of those incidents. We're just trying to get down to a more granular level of detail around what are the things that are happening in schools that we need to provide that support to them more centrally.

Mr EDMUNDS - I don't want to interrupt too much, but I've just got one more, if that's all right. One of the bits of feedback I've heard is that perhaps if there has been a psychosocial issue for a member of school staff or worker, perhaps one of the ways forward for them is to change schools or change workplaces.

Is that something that's easily facilitated, or is that something that the department prefers not to do? Do you have any comment on that, because I've had some reports that that is a blocker that perhaps is in place for some people who are away from work who might wish return but just not to that specific workplace.

Ms WEBSTER - To answer that in a couple of ways, first of all, we have a Psychosocial Safety Taskforce that was established in 2025 to build awareness and capability around the workforce around psychosocial safety, with a focus on prevention of harm. That's another way we're doing that. It would be very much case by case.

As I said, there's two ways of managing this in the department: there's the formal approach that we have to injury management and workers' compensation; but there's the human element of our learning services in schools and early years where we'd actually work with a

worker to say, 'What are the barriers to you returning to the workplace', obviously working with their psychologist or their health provider around what are the barriers for them returning. I would say my observation has been it's very much case by case for everyone, and I think that's -

Mr EDMUNDS - But if you got clear feedback from their health professional that setting foot onto school X is part of the biggest barrier to getting them back in the workforce, I assume that there's mechanisms to go, 'We can look at school Y'.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, or we can look at other parts of the department that they might be able to work in until they're ready to return to that school or there's another school that they could work in.

Ms PALMER - Just to add to that, there's a lot of work that's being done in the preventative space as well to make sure that we don't get to that place, and we know that that's where you get such a good return on your investment.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. Sorry, Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - No, thank you. That's fine. It did allude to some of the answers that I'll be getting in the next question anyway, but it was just in relation to violence in our schools. Coming from someone who has some involvement with daycares, it's only becoming more prevalent in younger people at that age as well, and that's happened in the last year or two. That concerns me because that cohort will be moving into schools as well.

I'm sure there's lots of programs you'll tell me about there, but just a general overview of how - at what point is it unsafe for someone to be at school if they're acting violently? At what point do we send people home or not allow them to come back to schools? What is that threshold?

Ms PALMER - That would be a decision that I would assume would be taken by the staff who are there in that moment. The teacher, the senior leadership, and the principal would be the ones that are there on the ground.

Mr HISCUTT - It's a case-by-case basis.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I don't know if there's anything you would add to that.

Mr HISCUTT - Is there a policy around that for people to follow, or is it done by a -

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. There is a framework around that, and it would be around risk for that young person and for the other young people and for the teaching staff. When it's much younger children, we have to think about things that are causing that much more so, perhaps, than older children. I know from a schools and early years perspective, all the principals, the support staff work really hard to make sure that that young person can stay in school, because we don't want to normalise that being away from the school. And we want to work as hard as we can to address the reasons why they're behaving in a way that is, perhaps, not appropriate or unsafe.

There's certainly a framework and mechanisms, and from a schools and early years perspective there's a team that works with the school if it's something that the school can't manage on their own or they need that support with. But principals and managers of child and family centres are really good at managing and identifying those issues early and what are the things that need to be put in place, with safety being an absolute priority for the young people and the children.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - Obviously, you need to keep them there, but also, I guess, not at the detriment of everybody else.

Ms WEBSTER - No. It's an absolute balance that our schools play.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I just wanted to ask, in a general sense, around the independent review of education that was done and what we're doing to report on and monitor implementation of recommendations. Is that available in the public domain somewhere that you can point us to where people can see clear updates on what's happening? And I'm interested in how it infuses across to budget, whether there's specifics you can point to about funding for implementation of recommendations.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you very much. It was a wonderful review undertaken by Vicky Bayliss and it certainly gave us a clear and very honest picture of where we are at. I accepted 13 of the 14 recommendations in full, and the remaining recommendation in principle. I would ask Jenny Burgess, who's the Deputy Secretary Strategy and Performance if she would come to the table. She's actually doing the roll out of the recommendations.

Ms WEBB - I appreciate that.

Ms PALMER - And they are reported on quarterly.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That was the main thrust of my question. I'm not necessarily asking for an update on all the 13 or 14. I think that's not a good use of our time today. I was most interested about we're monitoring and reporting on that going forward in a public way that's accountable and what the regularity was.

Ms PALMER - There's quarterly reports that come to me around the progress of the rolling out of that, and then annually there's a public report comes out.

Ms WEBB - The public reporting is only on an annual basis?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - And is that done via the annual report of the department or is it in a separate way or on a website, or where can people refer to that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. That's done separately on the website.

Ms WEBB - All right. Has there been any public reporting in that way yet?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. There's been one report in October last year.

Ms WEBB - Right. And so October this year we'd expect to see the next annual update.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. That's correct. .

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That's the main thing I wanted to ask about that review. Not that I'm not interested in the implementation of things. It's just that won't spend on it today.

Ms PALMER - No. That's fine.

Ms WEBB - And I have another question around LGBTQIA+ support in schools. We recently had our Tasmanian parliamentary friends of the LGBTQIA+ community forum in May, and we heard about serious problems facing young LGBTQIA+ Tasmanians, including a higher rate of suicide ideation compared to their peers interstate. And an important role - we heard about the really important positive role that schools can play in this space to create more protective environments.

I wanted to ask you some questions following on from hearing about that in the forum, to hear about what DECYP is doing to support LGBTQIA+ students in our schools. And particularly, one of the things that was pointed to as a particularly positive and supportive measure were pride groups in schools.

I'm interested about what the department's doing to foster sustainable pride groups in as many schools as possible statewide, and how we're ensuring staff are able to effectively challenge any bullying or promote inclusion within the school environment.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you very much for the question, and I will pass to the secretary who has all the details that sit behind this. But you're absolutely right, our schools are for everyone, and our expectation is that all students feel safe and seen and heard regardless of their sexuality. In December of 2022 our government released its Supporting Sexuality, Sex and Gender Diversity in Schools policy and associated procedure to ensure the provision of inclusive education and to help ensure all children and young people have equal opportunities for learning and wellbeing.

And I think that what comes with actually having a policy position in place is that you are held to account to that policy position, and from that there's been some really great outcomes. And I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. I think that DECYP was the first Tasmanian government agency to establish an LGBTQIA+ reference group in 1997. Obviously, that continues, and membership includes, obviously, representatives from the department. I usually try and chair that reference group when I'm available. We have representatives from Catholic Education Tasmania and Independent Schools Tasmania, LGBTQIA+ organisations and community members.

We have a priority workplan for 25-27, which is an internal workplan for DECYP, documenting focus areas and actions for implementation over the next 24 months. That is to improve educational outcomes of LGBTQIA+ young people, their mental health and their sense of safety, and to ensure welcoming, inclusive and safe environments to support the department's values and enable all our children to be known, safe, well and learning.

A key focus of the strategic issues reference group workplan is the development of an action plan for DECYP by the end of 2027. And the action plan will outline actions and outcomes for the department to include supportive and inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ children and young people, staff and their families. It will align with Tasmania's LGBTQIA+ framework, including the action plan which is currently in development and expected late this year.

The department's education, care and child safety services play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of our LGBTQIA+ children and young people. At a system level, teams across the department are working together to foster inclusive environments and strengthen support for children and young people, staff, families and carers. I'm just getting the group pride numbers for you - pride group numbers, as well, for you.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And I'm interested in how staff are being - their capacity is being built to really challenge bullying and promote inclusion.

Ms PALMER - Certainly. I'll ask Jodee Wilson, Deputy Secretary Development and Support to come to the table. My apologies. It's Trudy. Trudy Pearce, Deputy Secretary Schools and Early Years.

Ms PEARCE - Sorry, can I just check what the question was.

Ms WEBB - It was just around what's been done to build the capacity of staff in schools to effectively challenge bullying and promote inclusion.

Ms PEARCE - Great. Thanks. Yes. As you would know, we have a number of professional support staff in all our schools. And they are also members of what we call a school support and wellbeing team. And that team is charged with ensuring that all students feel included, and they work to build and address cultures that build that inclusivity, and address where there are issues.

Ms WEBB - The main thrust of the question was, are we equipping our staff for all of this. So not just, 'here's a specific member who's supposed to do this in the school,' but how we're making sure all staff are actually able to promote inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ students and address bullying if they encounter it in their classrooms or in the playground or wherever it might be.

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister. Through a range of proactive and reactive models. There's professional learning are provided to all our staff in relation to inclusive practices, whether that's diversity of students, a whole range of different areas, and ensuring that we are proactive and preventative in that space.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So there's a specific learning, capacity building, professional development framework for that. Great. Thank you.

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Ms PALMER - Very quickly, Chair, and I realise we are very tight for time.

CHAIR - We are. Yes.

Ms PALMER - But I do have a question that was taken on notice with regard to interstate teacher numbers. With regard to those interstate teacher numbers, in 2025 there was 36. In 2026 there were 21.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - And we also have the pride group information.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. We don't capture those numbers at a system level, but we have identified a priority area of modules for all staff around LGBTIQ+, and we're currently working with Working It Out to prepare those modules and we have regular training through Working It Out as well to facilitate pride groups.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr GAFFNEY - My question goes - and it actually reaffirms the connected, capable and confident with the creative arts. Sometimes we've seen with this government that the arts seems to take a back place to STEM because of focus, and I'm just wondering, with efficiencies across the board, I'm hoping that there is some monitoring that it's not the creative arts in our schools that will bear the brunt of not having allocated funds, staff, teachers, opportunities for the creative arts to blossom at - yes, so there's a focus from this government on STEM, and I think at the bereavement of the arts.

I just would like some reaffirm from the minister or the staff about where is that placed. If we put the A back into STEM, we'd have STEAM, minister, and I'm just thinking that that needs to be up there with it, because a lot of those students you talk about being connected and confident and creative and having success are in the arts category.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly, and I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - The arts is actually a core learning area of the Australian curriculum from prep to year 10, so no, there's no intention. Just as a shoutout, I'm attending the Elizabeth College Happy Days performance this evening after, so they're alive and well in our schools, Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Very good. Pleased to hear, yes.

Ms WEBSTER - No intention to change that, and we're currently working with the Australian curriculum.

Mr GAFFNEY - And so you work with principles to ensure that they have a good cross-section of syllabus choice and selection for all students?

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Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely. So teachers are supported with curriculum resources and through the Teaching and Learning Centre, and programs are adapted to fit with those sort of different school settings and contexts from prep to year 10.

Mr GAFFNEY - And the sharing specialist teachers across schools happens still?

Ms WEBSTER - It does happen, and I know that from talking to principals, and have learning services work together facilitate that, yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. No, fine. Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Just really quickly, as we move through the reform about our multi-school organisations, there's even more opportunity within groupings of schools and with MSOs for the sharing of that sort of resource. It's one of the upsides for sure of having families of schools.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, I'm trying to talk quickly.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I know we spoke about this briefly last year. The DECIP annual report indicates the loss of teachers in the first five years at 28 per cent, nearly a quarter of our - or more than a quarter of our new teachers are leaving the industry within five years. What's the latest, most up-to-date figures on that, and also what's being done to address this?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. While I got the department to look at figures to answer your question there, you know, one of the things we were talking about before is the work that we're doing the University of Tasmania to ensure that, you know, our early year teachers, when they actually hit the ground, are ready to teach, classroom-ready, so that their expectations of what will be greeting them are realistic, and, you know, they're for teaching in 2026 and beyond. It's really about making sure that our teachers, you know, are classroom-ready. I'll just see if we're still getting some of that -

Mr HISCUTT - I might also add while they're doing frantic searching -

Ms PALMER - We've got that information.

Mr HISCUTT - Is there any way of that being determined secondary school versus primary school, what that figure looks like in between those schools, or is it only recorded on a holistic level?

Ms PALMER - No, we've got a holistic figure here for you, yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Be interesting to know whether it's coming into -

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Over the last three years, Mr Hiscutt?

Mr HISCUTT - That'll do, thank you, yes.

Ms WEBSTER - 2023-24, the number was 402, with an attrition rate of 4.48. 2024-25, it was 370, with an attrition rate of 8.38. And this year, 2025-26, 353 with an attrition rate of 6.23.

Ms PALMER - Probably one of the other things to consider here is the \$5.1 million investment that's been made into Wellbeing Connect, and also the department now has a system in place whereby we actually have a touch point with our first-year teachers. I think it's within the first six months.

Ms WEBSTER - That's correct. And that was all teachers - sorry, through you, minister - not just early career.

Mr HISCUTT - Can you get the figures on - sorry, that's early year, meaning is it within the first five years, or do you mean -

Ms WEBSTER - We can get that as well.

Mr HISCUTT - All right. I'll take that later.

Ms PALMER - Yes, we're getting that for you. But, yes, to have that touch point with our first year teachers, you know, within the first few months that they're actually on the ground to help work through, you know, any issues that they might be having, so really making sure that we're nurturing those early career teachers.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Right. Sorry. Yes. I'm interested in staffing ratios and what's being done to ensure those ratios are upheld and classrooms aren't overcrowded.

Ms PALMER - I know that - I'm going to try and remember this figure off the top of my head - but we are certainly very well-placed, Tasmania, with the teacher to student ratios. I believe we're one of the top states and territories across the country when it comes to the teacher-student ratios. But I'll pass to - I will ask Trudy Pearce if she would come back up to the table to look at this.

CHAIR - Welcome again, Ms Pearce.

Ms PEARCE - Sorry, can I just get that question again?

Mr EDMUNDS - It's essentially around staffing ratios and what work is being done to ensure those ratios are upheld and classrooms aren't overcrowded.

Ms PEARCE - Whilst we have guidance in relation to staffing ratios for teachers, and that's particularly applied in the kindergarten area, where we try to work with a cap and bring in additional staff when it reaches and goes above a cap, we currently don't have a cap on class sizes, which allows some level of flexibility in schools where they're able to meet their home area enrolments and their class sizing structures.

We are very aware, though, however, of the complexity of some classes in relation to the learning needs and the accommodations that those students require, and so they're often met through additional funding that's provided for individual students, additional teacher assistance in the room, colleague teachers. It is an area that we are progressing in relation to looking at what complexity in class sizes or how do we measure complexity in class sizes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. It's difficult to get out of the budget papers, so I'll just ask the minister and then we can see who. But I'm interested in the funding model for specifically Southern Support School and what that looks like, because I've just been informed - and again, this is anecdotal, so this is on behalf of a constituent - that the Southern Support School in particular isn't running music classes anymore. I'm interested if that's the case, and whether that's - what the circumstances are around that. I'm interested in context of that and whether that's around the funding model or, you know, availability or whatnot.

Ms PEARCE - I'm unaware at this stage that music isn't being or music therapy isn't being provided at the Southern Support School. I am aware it is in a number of other support schools.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms PEARCE - And I, yes, do further investigation as to what that would be. It may well be around the availability of a teacher at this point in time, but we would be working with them.

Mr EDMUNDS - Perhaps I'll just stick that on notice for our house. Might be easier than doing it now.

Ms PALMER - No, I'm not going to take questions on notice.

Mr EDMUNDS - No, not on notice; I mean as part of our leg co. I can just take it out of the Estimates.

Ms PALMER - Sure, yes. No problem.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. We'll commit to having a look at that.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, sure.

Mr EDMUNDS - Then the funding model or, sorry, the funding structure, maybe just a level below the budget papers, if we get a picture of that, please.

Ms PALMER - Think I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

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Mr SALTER - Support schools do have a tailored funding model, given their unique context. If you're after a breakdown of the dollars for each of the support schools, would that be sufficient?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. If that's something that can be tabled, that'd be fantastic. Thanks.

Mr SALTER - Yes. Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - One last one, and I'm not sure where this fits. It might come up later in infrastructure, but I'm interested - sorry.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, I'll ask it. The Rosny hit a lot of interest, particularly with visiting school groups, the lift at Rosny College and its status. Is this something I should ask now or later?

CHAIR - Well, why not ask it.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'll ask it. Yes.

CHAIR - Because you've got some people here.

Mr EDMUNDS - How's it going?

CHAIR - It's the people in here, minister.

Mr EDMUNDS - I know it's been a bit of an ongoing saga for us on the eastern shore, and I wouldn't bring it up here flippantly, but it's becoming - getting quite a lot of feedback about it. So I'd be interested in where its status is at.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly, and I'll ask the deputy secretary.

Mr SALTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. Certainly, we've made every effort to get the lift operationally in a shorter time frame, but we do need to get a new lift installed. Design is underway on a new ramp and let's hope that that can be installed and they plan to build it by the end of June. In terms of the lift, around 26 weeks for delivery once ordered. So that's looking like the beginning of term 1, 2027.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. Appreciate the update.

CHAIR - Thank you. Did you have a burning question? I can see, Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Just one last one amongst a few.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - I just noticed in the performance indicators, reading students strong or exceeding in year 3 and year 7 has gone backwards. You know, 25 per cent of those eight indicators are going backwards. What are we doing in that space? Obviously, we're, you know, increasing, we're seeing record levels of spending in the Education department, but there are

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still areas that are going backwards. I will note that my kids will be three and five next year, so they should go up a bit.

Mr GAFFNEY - Take it up with Mum.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, exactly.

Ms PALMER - We look forward to that. Thank you very much, and I will pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms WILSON - Thanks, minister. We are looking to pursue sustained improvement over time. As the minister has previously said, we've got unprecedented resources into schools to support teachers to work with students in developing those core and basic literacy skills.

Some of our smaller data sets that we're monitoring more closely over time has shown really pleasing progress. For example, in the early years, where we've concentrated energy and effort, there's been close to 2 per cent increase in achievement over a very short period - last two years - since we introduced our structured approach to teaching literacy.

We know that the investment in the early years will take time for it to flow through to the other areas that we would be monitoring in our data sets. But the Progressive Achievement Test is showing good progress, up by 0.5 per cent across the years of schooling. So it is varied and there are minimal gains in some areas.

We continue to look at what else and what more we can do to support those teachers, to work with students. But we've got a foundation of improvement that we're working on, particularly starting in the early years, and where we have invested energy and effort and teacher training and resources, we are showing some progress.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Thank you for the answer. Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you. And Ms Webb, if you had a final burning question.

Ms WEBB - Sure.

CHAIR - Before we take a break.

Ms WEBB - We've got five minutes. Yes. So just to follow on from that, actually, my understanding is that there's a group who report to the premier who are tasked with the ongoing monitoring of literacy in Tasmanian schools. Is there going to be a similar group tasked with looking at numeracy outcomes in that same some sort of way?

Ms PALMER - Well, the literacy one that you're speaking about, yes, sits with the Premier. I think there's numerous ways that we can be held to account looking at the outcomes of students. In the same way that we're able to manage the data around the achievement in literacy, it'll be reflected in numeracy as well. I don't know if there's anything else to add to that.

Ms WILSON - Certainly the approach to strengthening numeracy follows very closely to the learnings that we've had, and that follows the advice that we - recommendations from

the independent education review. And so the mirroring of that will give us good confidence that we will continue to monitor internally the progress towards improved student outcomes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And another quick area, then, before the break. The School Food Matters program, the school lunches, which I think is a great program, but I understand that at the recent conference, there's conversations about the fact that the costs are rising to provide the meals, potentially. And so I'm wondering about what plans and efforts are being made to look at how we can continue with that program, continue to deliver it and expand it, but manage potential rising costs.

So I would appreciate that there'd probably be things to be looking at like rising costs of food, but also potentially the salary side of it. I'm interested in how much of the cost is salaries rather than the food itself, potentially. And whether there's any intention to look at co-payments, potentially, from parents, which could be tackled in lots of different ways. Hopefully very inclusive and progressive ways. Any thoughts there?

Ms PALMER - Yes. It has been raised about having a co contribution, and I know that there are other models where there is a parent co-contribution, and I don't know that that is on or off the table, but if you've got four children at the one school that could be prohibitive to being involved in this program.

What I can say is that there is that \$14.6 million commitment to double the number of schools that are participating in the program. We got advice from the Crown Solicitor regarding the continuation of the program. And so to be consistent with the advice from the Crown Solicitor, looking at the program beyond 2026, we are progressing an open and competitive tender process to ensure impartiality, compliance and procurement legislation and to achieve best value for money.

So the tender for the next iteration is currently open and we're going through that. But certainly, we have to be looking at the sustainability of this program as well. We want to continue delivering it to the schools and what opportunity is there for possible expansion, but how do we do that with a sustainable model.

So it's out to tender at the moment, and the tender criteria includes a demonstration of local economic and social benefits, also including supporting our local primary producers. Because we do want to ensure that the program is fit for purpose, provides value for money and meets the needs of our schools and our school families.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And can you give me a broad understanding of how the costs for that program break out in terms of salaries or cost of foods or other elements?

Ms PALMER - I just want to be a little bit cautious because there's an open tender process at the moment.

Ms WEBB - Okay. All right.

Ms PALMER - So I wonder, once that tender process is open, could I - - -

Ms WEBB - I'll follow up another time. Yes, that's fine. You can follow up.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - There are other opportunities and I'll make sure that I can answer those questions.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. And it now being almost 11 am, if we take a 15-minute break and we return at 11.15 with item 1.2, early learning. Thank you. Stop the broadcast please. So if we have any other questions back in, once we finish the others, we can always come back, but I think that we need to go into early learning.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

The Committee suspended from 10.58 a.m. to 11.15 a.m.

Output Group 1.2

Early Learning

CHAIR - Welcome back, minister. We'll start off with 1.2: Early Learning, and I will ask Mr Edmunds to start the questioning.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Just before we do that, could I table a couple of answers to questions for the committee. The first is extension school enrolments headcount for Years 11 and 12 students at census 1 2026, and the second document is Year 11 and 12 annual attendance rates, and it excludes colleges. We also have a couple of answers to questions that were taken on notice, so I'll pass to the secretary first and then to the deputy secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The question was around the separation rate for early year teachers. The rate for teachers, 0 to 4 years, is 8 per cent of all our separations, and that's from April 2025 to March 2026.

Ms PALMER - And then our deputy secretary, Kane Salter.

Mr SALTER - Thank you. If I can make a correction on my answer to Rosny College, the new ramp will be completed during Term 3 break in October 2026. This has been delayed due to planning approvals. The new lift will be completed by the end of Term 2, 2027, provided there's no delays with international shipping, but we do continue to work with the college to support student needs in the interim.

I've also got the answer for the breakdown of the program funding element, which was the \$13.8 million. Using an Australian government definition of 'region', inner regional is \$5.9 million; outer regional, \$7.1 million; remote, \$500,000; very remote, \$263,000.

Ms WEBB - If I may, in a Tasmanian context, would we understand 'inner regional' to be our urban areas?

Mr SALTER - Yes, probably.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Edmunds, would you like to start the questioning?

PUBLIC

Mr EDMUNDS - Just one quick follow up to that. I know we're really short on time. Is that local government planning approvals that created that delay with the lift?

Ms PALMER - With regard to Rosny College?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Mr SALTER - I understand it would be local government, yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. Where am I? Too many tabs open, by the sounds of it.

CHAIR - Early Learning.

Ms PALMER - 1.2.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. Are the department efficiencies and job cuts expected to impact early childhood outcomes and regulations, including the assessment and rating of services and unannounced monitoring visits?

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

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minster. We will absolutely be doing the work to determine where there's least impact to front-line service delivery. Protecting children is our priority. Whilst we expect all our outputs to participate in that sustainability approach, we would absolutely be prioritising where we need to with protecting children, including some of those early years monitoring activities.

Mr EDMUNDS - How many jobs are expected to go from early childhood outcomes and regulation?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. It would be far too early to speculate on that. we haven't done that work yet.

Mr EDMUNDS - When you do anticipate that work will occur?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. We'll be sitting down with our leadership group in the next couple of weeks working through where we can look at duplication, where we can look at improving efficiencies. The key, though, will be the work that we're doing around the voluntary redundancies.

I think you need to remember that that is a voluntary process. People may put their hands up. If they put their hands up in this space, then we would look at it on a case-by-case basis and assess the need in that area. No idea at this stage.

Mr EDMUNDS - Minister, a few months ago, you said your department would re-engage the Scottsdale community for further consultation regarding the CFLC and the long daycare option. I'm interested in an update on how that's going.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. It was wonderful to have that election commitment to see the building of three new CFLCs. They're quite remarkable in the work that they do. The

election commitment was around building a new CFLC and if there was a need in the community for child care facilities that there was an opportunity for that to be progressed. We did some consultation. The department went out, set up the Local Enabling Group, did consultation, and the advice that came back to me was that it didn't appear that there was a need for child care.

The Honourable Tania Rattray from our house then came to me and asked if I would take another look at that. She was a little unsure about some of the information that was coming through, so we did do that. The department went back out.

I personally went and visited the Local Enabling Group in Scottsdale, heard first-hand from primarily mums who were there. We took another look and did a bit more of a deep dive and certainly found that there was a need for child care. There is a child care facility that is already there, Thrive, and it's quite complicated because it was about long daycare places versus after-school hours care, and the after-school hours care was impacting on the long daycare places that were available.

We came away and we found that the need for child care was probably even more than what we had initially anticipated. We've gone back to the department. We have been exploring outside of the box. Is what can be delivered strictly through the election commitment going to be sufficient?

I have concerns it won't be. I think there are other opportunities that if we invest slightly differently, we can get a much better outcome for that community. I think we can almost double the long daycare places that would be available. There is also an opportunity, should the LEG wish to proceed with a different option, to also offer a different version of out-of-school hours care.

We're collating all of that information now. We'll be presenting that to the Local Enabling Group, which is made up of community members, parents, the council, the school principal. They all have a voice in that space, and we think that there could be an opportunity, if this is the way the local enabling group would like to go, to actually have some really quick fixes for that community, which will actually really impact particularly the professional mothers who actually are not able to work in areas of child care and social work, where we know we have the markets. We're really excited about what we're going to be going back to the community with, and we're in the process of doing that now.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. Minister, even in today's paper, child care has raised its head in the Mersey electorate, with the mayor, Jarman, coming out quite strongly with some ideas. I'll go to that as an example. Huge waiting list to access child care for working families, and new facilities are instantly swamped with families even putting their unborn children on the list.

Latrobe Council and federal government recently worked wonderfully well to fast track the new facility in the main street, which is great, but that still leaves a dark shadow over two local family daycare services that were operating as a dual educator model.

I understand there's perhaps a difference of opinion between you and the federal government on this. What can you and the Tasmanian government do to support essential providers that may wish to operate as a dual educator in a regional area and keep them open? It's already too late for Abracadabra in Spreyton, and if Addisons in Latrobe is also forced to close by the Education and Care Unit, it will leave 50 families with no child care services and unable to work.

There seems to be an idea from governments that the bigger the centres, rather than the small business dual educator models, because of lots of different reasons, but in smaller communities, they are the ones that have operated for years and operated very successfully for years, and I think they are the ones that are bearing the brunt of the government's decision-making processes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Really happy to answer this, and it was wonderful to work with the federal government and the council and state government. The Tasmanian government made a \$200,000 commitment. It can work quite well, can't it, when all levels of government come together, and it was great to be able to secure that facility for Latrobe. I will say I understand that as of mid-May, there will be one dual educator model service, where two family daycare educators provide care at the same residence operating in Tasmania. And the problem we have here is that this is not compliant with national law, and that is national law that is agreed to nationally. So this is not about Tasmania going alone, it is not about Tasmania being stricter than other states.

The national law is a shared framework, legislative framework, and it's agreed to by all states and territories. And I really do want to stress this again that the current framework does not provide an option for dual educator models of family day care. Legislative amendments require agreement at a national level involving broad consultation and consensus, and it is essential that all parties operate within the current legislative framework.

So Tasmania's regulatory authority within Early Childhood Outcomes and Regulation, ECOR for short, which administers the laws which ensure the safety, the health and wellbeing of children, has actually granted a number, a number of temporary waivers to the two services that we had operating as dual educator models over the past three years.

A huge amount of work has gone into working with those two dual educator models to try and help them move towards compliance. So a number of waivers, really working with them, saying, 'This is where you have to get to, this is the national law, this is where we have to go'.

And it's important that while childcare is under the remit of the federal government, the regulation of it sits with me and sits with this department. So I am advised that one service has since decided to close its service, and to be fair, other models, when the national law came in all around Tasmania, moved to compliance.

So we only had these two facilities that weren't moving to compliance, supported them in every way that we could but we weren't able to get them there. And I think if you flip this scenario, and if you say to me as a minister, there's been an incident in one of these dual educator providers - if there was an incident, this parliament would have every right to point the finger at me and say you have known for three years that they were not compliant with the national law and now this has happened.

So I have really struggled with this because that is my responsibility. So we've had a number of engagements with the department trying to help them move towards compliance. It is not at odds with the federal government. This is federal, this is nationally consistent legislation. And as I say, I don't know what more the department could have done. I've met with them personally, I've advocated for them, but at the end of the day we are responsible for compliance and they are not compliant.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

Ms PALMER - And as I say, if the conversation flips, you would have every right to hold me accountable and to hold this department accountable.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. So is there anything that can be done to attract another provider? Does the government have any idea how it can help? Because we're in a situation now, we don't have that service in our area because these two are closing, which is fine, I understand the national law and whatever, but has the government got any capacity to attract, to provide or seek out, work with mayor Jarman and mayor Freshney to see what else they know. Latrobe's, you know, it's good, but Devonport are going to be devoid of that capacity for that service.

Ms PALMER - Yes. As I say, this sits within the remit of the federal government. It is their responsibility. Tasmanian taxpayers keep stepping up in this space, our government keeps stepping up in this space, but it is not our responsibility. But it was wonderful to partner with the federal government recently around the BEEF funding, which is seeing - I'll just check in with you, Ginna, if I could - it's five new childcare - I think it's five new childcare facilities that we're partnering with the federal government to actually fund.

And the criteria around that was really looking at where there were childcare deserts - is a term that's been used. So it's been really good to work with the federal government and to partner with them in that space. We certainly responded with great haste with regard to the Latrobe situation that we were in and we're always trying to play our part, but it is the remit of the federal government.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, just one more point to add. Lady Gowrie also is opening a brand new centre in Latrobe later this year as well, which is good.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Just to follow up, minister, I'm just wondering what work's being undertaken by your government this year to keep our children safe in early childhood education and care settings?

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much for that question. I probably would like to just start by thanking the members for their support for the recent ECEC bill, which, just that minor amendment to the Education and Care Services National Law was really good to do that. Tasmania already has strong protections in place, including mandatory working with

vulnerable people registration, a proactive regulator in Early Childhood Outcomes and Regulation, and the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework. However, we do recognise that more must always be done and this year has been about lifting standards, strengthening oversight and closing any gaps.

So a key focus has been implementing nationally agreed reforms in partnership with the Commonwealth and other states and territories. And one of the most important changes has been the introduction of mandatory child safety training for all ECEC staff, for all volunteers and for students, and that commenced in February of this year. So this ensures that everyone working with children has a consistent and up-to-date understanding of how to identify and, most importantly, how to respond to any risks.

So we've also supported the rollout of a national worker register, which is now in effect. And this creates a secure national record of the workforce and gives regulators far greater visibility over who is working in the sector and where they are working. And importantly, Tasmania has achieved the second-highest compliance rates in the country at 97.2 per cent, demonstrating the sector's commitment to these new national reforms that we're seeing.

In terms of enforcement, there has been a significant strengthening of the regulatory framework. Penalties under the national law have tripled, sending a clear message that serious non-compliance will not be tolerated, and at the same time, the limitation period for prosecutions has been extended, ensuring that serious breaches can still be pursued even if they come to light later.

The on-the-ground oversight has also been enhanced, and unannounced spot checks have been expanded, including joint compliance visits between state and Commonwealth regulators, meaning services are subject to more frequent and more rigorous scrutiny. And ministers across states and territories have also agreed to more consistent expectations for regular regulatory visits, providing that stronger and that more consistent oversight of the system.

CHAIR - No. Thank you, minister. Appreciate it. Do we have any further questions in early learning before we move to libraries? No. If not, minister, if we could go to 2.1, Libraries Tasmania, and I'll ask Mr Gaffney to open the questioning.

Output Group 2.1

Libraries Tasmania

Ms PALMER - Wonderful. And just before you do, Mr Gaffney, could I invite to the table the Executive Director, Libraries Tasmania, Mr Patrick Gregory. Thank you, Mr Gaffney. Thank you, Chair.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you. With the Treasurer's desire to \$228 million of operational efficiencies from DECYP, aimed at reducing the number of backroom staff by between 150 to 300, depending on who you speak to. Does this reduction include library, archival and heritage and government records staff? And if so, how many?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Thank you, through you, minister. So again, we'd be currently looking at that work, working with Mr Gregory's exec director around efficiencies.

PUBLIC

Too early to speculate on any numbers, but we'd certainly be asking libraries to contribute to our overall savings plan, and they have done in the past, but would not like to speculate on what those numbers or what those positions might be.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - We just haven't done that work. And I think there may be people in libraries working in admin roles who equally might put their hand up for that targeted voluntary redundancy.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Again, we'd work through that on a case-by-case basis and assess the need and work with Mr Gregory around those options.

Mr GAFFNEY - Through you, minister. I know this is a difficult question. Is there a timeline when you guys are thinking that this is going to roll out by, or how is that going to progress?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. As I said, we're meeting with our leadership group mid-June. We have a meeting with them. We've got meetings with the unions following that. I think the premier announced earlier that the Targeted Voluntary Redundancy program would be released by each agency in June this year. 1 July, I think, was the date. We will be doing that, and then we'll be assessing those applications for voluntary redundancy as quickly as we can.

Mr GAFFNEY - Will these operational efficiencies see perhaps greater collaboration between school libraries and those in the community? Is there an opportunity there for that to occur, or do you see that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I'm happy to get some examples from Mr Gregory, but that already does occur. I was recently up at Swansea, and that is an operation where it's right on the school site, and the library operates for members of the public and also the school children on various days. There's an operational arrangement around that, but it operates very successfully there, and I'm sure there are other options.

Ms PALMER - Libraries also has a school library team within its function, and that is to support schools, particularly around improving their book collection, but perhaps if I pass to Mr Gregory.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. Eight of our 46 public libraries at the moment are the joint use school community libraries that the secretary's referenced at Swansea. They work really efficiently in some communities. The challenge always is managing community access to school sites. Some schools are appropriate for that, and others aren't. We don't have plans to expand that program at the moment, but the eight that we've got are working well.

The minister's referenced the school library team under the Lifting Literacy initiative, and they're doing great work at the moment. We also share digital infrastructure between school libraries and public libraries. The library management system that public libraries use is used by school libraries as well. We work with them wherever we can, really.

Mr GAFFNEY - Minister, it's probably a year now since the Devenport and Penguin centres out-of-hours open library access, and I'd be interested to know, can you give us an update; the number of people using it; and when it might be and is it being considered to be rolled out to other libraries if it's been successful; and if so, where might they be and when?

Ms PALMER - I will pass to Mr Gregory on that, but it certainly is proving to be very successful, and there are plans to extend open access. We're looking at the Lilydale library later this year. I might pass to Mr Gregory to give you more detail.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you. Through you, minister. The program's been really successful so far. At the moment, up to 31 March, we had 115 members registered at Penguin and 162 members registered at Devonport. Visitation to that point: 1737 visitors at Penguin, and 1631 at Devonport. I think we found trialling this at a large library and a smaller library's been particularly effective at Penguin.

Devenport library's got an extensive range of opening hours already, and people have appreciated the extra access, but it's been a real game-changer at Penguin, which is only staffed 11-and-a-half hours a week, and they suddenly have 98 hours a week where you can access that library. Twenty per cent of all visits to Penguin library are now during open library access hours.

As the minister's mentioned, as part of changes to the Lilydale library, we're actually moving that out of the school library in the middle of this year. Going back to my previous point, the current Lilydale public library is right in the middle of the school, and it makes community access quite difficult, but we've got the opportunity to move that to a space on the school site which is accessible from the road, and we know that the community wants to use that space: the Progress Association, the Historical Society. It's a perfect opportunity in moving the library to set that up as an open library from the start.

Mr GAFFNEY - In this age of operational efficiencies, how much does it cost to set up? What's the ballpark figure, because you think, 'Yes, I'd like to do it here, here, and here, but we've only got this much money'? What's the cost of, say, the Penguin setup?

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. I don't have specific costs for Penguin. The figures vary depending on the library. It depends if there's not already self-checkout machines for loans. It depends a bit on the security system, lighting, cameras, things like that. We've run some numbers across different options, and the ballpark figure would be about \$50,000 to set up a library's open access, and then the modest operational costs attached to that around a bit of extra cleaning or power going forward as well.

Mr GAFFNEY - With new schools on the infrastructure list, does the library placement, coming to that discussion, so that it is open for community access so that we don't have to move like we do Lilydale - how we have to move. I'm just wondering how is that worked into the discussion and the infrastructure build?

Ms PALMER - That's something we're looking at. Some of our schools are being upgraded, so that's a little bit different, but certainly, with larger redevelopments or new builds, it's looking at how can the amazing facilities that we have in our schools benefit our

communities, and we're seeing that through basketball courts, through gymnasiums. We're seeing it rolling out across our libraries.

We're constantly looking at how can we - because schools are closed for quite a number of months during the year, how can those facilities be utilised by the community and also utilised by the children who use them and the families that use them during the year? It certainly comes in our consideration.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. My last question is we're actually seeing in the community a number of community-based street libraries that are popping up, which is great, book exchanges. I wonder, how does Libraries Tasmania - if they've got stock they want to get rid of, or it's no longer suitable or useful, do they have a relationship with the communities who may want or need those books?

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. We don't have a direct relationship with street libraries. They're great local community initiatives, but a lot of books that we're getting rid of are damaged or out of date. We work, for example, with the Friends of Launceston Library who are a really great local community group, and they have an annual book sale, so we are able to repurpose some of our books through those forums.

The challenge for us with street libraries, because we have discussed this before, is effectively the collection is a government asset and the street libraries are private individuals, and how do you then manage transferring books to private individuals and the administration costs around that?

As I say, we have looked at it in the past, but there's a lot of process and administration around it, and we're really just instead focusing on making sure that the collections at public libraries are as good as they can be, and the libraries are as accessible as they can be, and give people access to reading matter that way.

Mr GAFFNEY - What do you do with the stock that's no longer useful.

Mr GREGORY - Securely dispose of. Through you, minister.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. If we could just go to Ms Webb and then onto Mr Hiscutt.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, Chair. With respect, is this still in Libraries? I've just got to do a quick correct of the record. My apologies.

CHAIR - We are still in Libraries, yes.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, it's actually in the previous output. I said that there were 5 new child care centres funded by the Commonwealth Building Early Education Fund, which we're collaborating and investing in, as well as the state. It's 6, so that's a good correct.

Mr GAFFNEY - The sixth one's in Mersey, isn't it?

Ms PALMER - I think it was the Huon.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm not sure if this does belong in Libraries, but I wasn't sure where else it belonged. It's around adult literacy and our adult literacy strategy, which I believe is no longer funded. There's no new funding coming through for that. I'm just wondering if you can outline for me - presumably then, we've got 26Ten, but if you can confirm funding arrangements around 26Ten going forward and any other adult literacy initiatives that are being funded so we can understand what's changing, if anything, around our investment in that space.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. We have Jodee Wilson at the table, Deputy Secretary, Development and Support. I'll pass to her. Thank you.

Ms WILSON - I'm just trying to find the figure of structural funding that will be repurposed to meet the activities in the implementation plan responsive to the new strategy that will be released in the next little while through really broad consultation. The strategy's been developed. We've taken opportunity to really learn from the activities from the last 10-year strategy, and there is a substantial structural budget that will be repurposed. No new money, but there is -

Ms WEBB - Where is it currently being deployed?

Ms WILSON - The activities that are currently being funded through the 26Ten strategy will then be repurposed in its entirety to fund the new strategy.

Ms WEBB - Okay. And so will we see the 26Ten come to an end and it becomes something different, a new iteration of initiatives under the new strategy, minister?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Deputy secretary.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. The new strategy will continue to access the branding of 26Ten. We know that many people identify with the brand.

Ms WEBB - It's well established.

Ms WILSON - Yes. And so we will certainly continue to look to the implementation plan being undertaken through that branding.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And when are we anticipating the new strategy beginning? Is it this year that it comes into play?

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. Yes, 16 June.

Ms WEBB - 16 June. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - And is there anything changing about the way we monitor progress in these areas? Are we able to continue to do that in an effective way? And if so, are we making progress?

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. There is, in this next phase, plans for ensuring that we've got a strong evaluation program so that we can really identify, over the course of the next 10 years, the opportunities to review what's working really well and make adjustments as we go forward. So part of the new strategy will be an evaluation of its effectiveness.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And was that the case with the strategy that's just coming to an end? Did we evaluate that strategy, and can we report on outcomes from it?

Ms WILSON - My apologies.

Ms WEBB - It's okay. I was just asking about whether the current strategy, which is coming to an end, was that subject to an evaluation, and are we able to report on the outcomes of that evaluation?

Ms WILSON - So over the course of time, there have been a number of reports that have been undertaken through independent means to be able to provide information back into the changes that we want to see in relation to the new strategy.

Ms WEBB - Okay. But that wasn't a publicly reported evaluation.

Ms WILSON - No. No, it was not undertaken in a public way. Can you help me out there?

Mr SALTER - Halfway mark evaluation.

Ms WILSON - That's right. I think there was the executive summaries to the reports that were uploaded onto the website.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

Ms WILSON - And then, sorry, minister, did you want the - I have got the funding, the recurrent funding.

Ms PALMER - Great. Thank you.

Ms WILSON - 1.2 million recurrent funding.

Ms WEBB - And that's expected to continue into the forward Estimates. So that's a flat figure, though. So we're just a flat figure out.

Ms WILSON - Okay. So it is adjusted so that in 2026-27 it's 1.272; in 2027-28, 1.3; in 2028-29, \$1.3; and in 29, 1.36.

CHAIR - Thank you. And minister, you had something you want to read?

Ms PALMER - Just two questions that we took on notice. The first was with regard to music being taught at the Southern Support School. I'm advised at this time a local school-based decision prioritised alternative programs.

An example that's been given to me is the kitchen garden program, based on what the school felt was the identified needs of the students. It is anticipated that a dedicated music program or a music class will be considered as part of the provision at the Southern Support School. And also Mr Salter also has a figure for you for the support school dollars.

Mr SALTER - Thank you, minister. So the figures comprise cash funding and staffing. So Northern Support School, their cash funding is 2.9 million and total staffing 33.4 FTE. North West Support School is 3.9 million cash funding and 42.75 FTE funding. Southern Support School, 2.9 million and 32.8 FTE funding.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thanks.

CHAIR - Thank you. And I have a question in libraries from Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - A very, very quick comment, was just to say that I spent a lot of time in Penguin and the open library has been - I've heard nothing but good things. So I just wanted to put that on the record.

Ms PALMER - Thank you for that feedback.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Hiscutt.

Ms PALMER - He's also got a Penguin on his cup, I think. He would like everybody to note that.

Output Group 3.1

Education Regulation

CHAIR - If there are no further questions in libraries, if we could move to 3.1, education regulation. And I will ask Mr Hiscutt to lead the questioning.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I think there's just someone coming to the table, so I might wait for that, if the minister wants to introduce.

CHAIR - Yes. The minister will welcome a new person to the table.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Lovely to have David Tilley with us. Mr Tilley is the director, Education Regulation.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Lead-in question, last year we had conversations around the fact that the three boards all had the same members on. I'm just wanting to know if there's been any independent review to ensure that they're acting for their specific boards, or what governance structures have been put in place to ensure that this is appropriate, and is there any legislation? Sorry, one question at a time. Sorry.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - So start with the first one. Yes. Has there been any independent review to ensure that that's appropriate?

Ms PALMER - I might just hand it to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. So through you, minister. No, there hasn't been any evaluation as yet. Anecdotally, Mr Tilley might be able to speak to that. I think we've certainly seen efficiencies in terms of - from the department's perspective. But it would be too early, I would think, to do an evaluation at this point. But through you, minister, Mr Tilley might have some more information on that.

Mr TILLEY - Through you, minister. Thank you. The new board structure has been in place now for just under 12 months. There are several governance arrangements that oversee how the board is performing, because the boards, plural, report to the minister.

So ultimately the minister issues a statement of expectations to each of the boards. Each of the boards is required to maintain a corporate plan and also report on their performance in their annual plan as well. So we're a little bit away from issuing the annual plans. But ultimately there's also fairly routine reporting from the chair of the board through to the minister directly.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Chair of the boards. Yes. Which is the same person. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry, just an additional, through you, minister. The boards actually, through the various chair's report - the various staff report through to the advisory council for Education Tasmania, which includes myself and the head of Catholic Education and Independent Schools Tasmania.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. And the second part was answered. Thank you. And the third part was just, are there any legislative changes intended around this operation?

Mr TILLEY - Through you, minister. No legislative changes have been made as yet, and as we look at the operation of the boards moving forward, we'll work with the department to determine whether any are required.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - And I might just pass to deputy secretary Jenny Burgess for more on that.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. The legislative program sits within the department, and we have had a representation from the chair of the board to have a look at when we might be able to schedule that into our review program.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Ms BURGESS - At this stage we will be commencing work on that in 2027.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Thank you for that answer. As I understand it, during the Commission of Inquiry into the government's response to child sexual abuse, the Teachers Registration Board admitted that they could not readily provide data on child sex abuse-related complaints, despite having that as a paramount task. Can they now provide that data to you on request?

Ms PALMER - So it certainly was a significant milestone in progressing the review of the Teacher Registration Act, and it's certainly bringing us closer to implementing Commission of Inquiry recommendations that are relating to the Teacher Registration Act of 2002, while also strengthening recognition of early childhood education and care teachers within the registration framework. So that's certainly part of the review that is being done. It's quite a big piece of work, and I'll just see if Mr Tilley has anything to add to that.

Mr TILLEY - Thank you. Through you, minister. The TRB systems were identified as being somewhat deficient through the Commission of Inquiry process. And since that time, a project has been undertaken to create a new customer relationship management system that oversees all of this data and will allow for that reporting to occur. That project is nearing the final stages, with the first phase being implemented from July this year. So reporting on those matters specifically will be readily available from July.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I'll ask one more, then, unless you've got a follow-up. And as I understand it, there was a Deloitte report into the exam irregularities last year, and I understand you've had some time now to have a look at that process. Are there any learnings you could share or have the recommendations from the report been implemented?

Ms PALMER - Yes. There's always learnings, and very happy to talk to that. No one ever wants to be in a situation where there are errors in exams. It's quite a stressful time for those who work in this space. It can be quite stressful as a minister as well. But we do understand that really difficult for our young people who are in that position. A lot of work actually goes into ensuring that our young people who are sitting exams know exactly what to do if there is an error.

We do everything we can to prepare them for that, and also with the staff who are actually supervising those exams, to ensure that they know exactly what to do. There has been progress made against all the recommendations, and I'll pass to Mr Tilley for more on that. Thank you.

Mr TILLEY - Thank you. Through you, minister. The report into the exam process from 2024 was provided to the boards in 2025. The report made 34 specific recommendations relating to various aspects of the exam process, some of which is handled by TASC. Other elements sit outside of TASC's responsibility. Since the report was provided, eight of the recommendations have been fully delivered on, with progress at varying stages being made on every other remaining recommendation.

Since April this year we've had a project stood up to implement those recommendations. They're in the process of examining what aspects of TASC's role and responsibilities need to be reviewed, and are examining what further changes can be made prior to the 2026 exams.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - And just to assist in that process, TASC has been provided an additional three FTE, namely, project manager, to oversee implementation of the review recommendations, and an additional position for each of the assessment and resulting teams. And then in addition to the three FTE, further support is being provided to the project manager from existing resourcing that was within education regulation, and that will certainly aid in the planning and implementation of the review recommendations.

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Mr HISCUTT - I'll note there will be a test at the end of the day.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thanks. I understand as of 30 June 2025 3692 teachers or 31 per cent of registered teachers remain on a provisional registration. What are the up-to-date numbers on this? Can you give us the up-to-date numbers on these?

Mr TILLEY - Sure thing. Through you, minister. Provisional numbers as at 31 March 2026 this year was 3475.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. That's an improvement, but it's still a high percentage of our - there's been suggested by some that are friends of mine, the blockage is being caused by a really difficult full registration process, and they compare it to completing a master's degree. The process involves assembling and annotating a 37-descriptor evidence portfolio, maintained a sustained, reflective journal and presenting to a formal panel while carrying a full classroom load.

With the shortage of teachers, what can be done to accelerate and simplify the process without creating a complete log jam and teacher burnout as they try to work with what appears to be an overly onerous obligation?

Ms PALMER - I think you're going to be very happy with this answer.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr TILLEY - Through you, minister. The board's provision of the full process was streamlined back in 2025. We had engaged with teachers, principals, those that had undertaken a process and people that were going through and were intending to. Captured their feedback and made several significant changes to the process itself.

Ultimately, we aim to reduce the administrative burden which we found, in some instances, was quite unnecessary. It was quite laborious for provisional teachers to compile enormous portfolios. And as of further changes that have been made this year, there is no longer a portfolio, there is no longer a reflective journal, nor is there a requirement to present to a formal panel. The process has been built on their current teaching practice and evidence being generated from that practice.

Applicants now use an enquiry approach that can be completed alongside their regular teaching practice within a shorter timeframe. And anecdotally, we're finding that some teachers are able to complete this now within five to six weeks.

Mr GAFFNEY - Good. I look forward to next year's numbers.

CHAIR - Noted.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's all from me.

CHAIR - Thank you.

PUBLIC

Mr EDMUNDS - I don't know if this fits here, but I might ask it. One thing that, as a parent and as an elected member, drives me up the wall, is that the schools have strong procedures around sharing photos of students who attend those schools, where you pretty much have to decide whether the school can share a photo of your kid.

And then we go to school assemblies and we see - elected members in particular, just willy-nilly taking photos of kids with no idea of the context of what's happening with that child and then being shared on social media.

And I certainly have had feedback about other elected members who do it. It's not a practice that I do. Does this fit here and what can we do about it? Because I don't think it's fair that when you have a child who - their success can't be celebrated by their school, and with good reason, and probably their parents can't even share the success of their own child because of issues that none of us would - or have a right to really understand, but then they can have their local elected member, at any level of government, share that image to the general public.

Does that fit here and is there anything that can be done from a department perspective to crack down on that?

Ms PALMER - It doesn't fit here, but we're more than happy to address it if you're happy to, Chair.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I know that schools make every effort when there's an event to say that there's a process to get parental consent to do that. We have some pretty strong policies around visitations of members of parliament or others at schools, so it's probably just a matter of us noting that, taking that away and making sure that we're putting some of that policy out when we send - once a week we send information to principals around things. Just reminding them, updating policies. We can do that.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. From my perspective as an elected member but as a parent as well. And particularly in local government, 29 councils, and is it potentially just something that is banned outright.

Ms WEBSTER - I'll undertake to look, through you, minister. I'll undertake to have a look at those protocols.

Ms PALMER - I think it is very common practice that you need to get permission to use the image of any child. But absolutely, I think in the area of assemblies where there's big groups of children, I certainly take that on notice.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thanks.

Ms PALMER - As in I note that you -

Mr EDMUNDS - I understand.

Ms PALMER - And perhaps there's work we could do there to strengthen that as elected members side of it.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Usually also be awarding thing at assemblies? Those are the photos that are often taken? I'm just trying to think through what photos we might take.

CHAIR - Thank you. Thank you, minister.

Grants and Subsidies

CHAIR - We have grants and subsidies. Do we have any question on grants and subsidies, members? Otherwise we will -

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. I do.

CHAIR - You do? Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - And this one may not be answerable. In relation to the new Better and Fairer Schools Agreement relating to non-government schools and the costs of providing student transport for non-government school students, is the cost of this transport included in the calculation and acquittal of Tasmania's share of funding for non-government schools in the bilateral agreement? If not, is it simply a hidden subsidy for non-government schools?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you very much. And I'll pass to deputy secretary, Mr Salter. Thank you.

Mr SALTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. In terms of the state funding to non-government schools, there isn't any reduction to reflect the cost of transport, which is different to the government school agreement.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. There's nothing in that bilateral agreement.

Mr SALTER - No. There's no funding that relates to transport for the non-government school sector.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you. That's good.

CHAIR - Thank you. Did we have any other questions on grants and subsidies? Otherwise we'll move to capital investment program. Did we have any questions? Yes.

Capital Investment Program

Mr GAFFNEY - I have one. Yes. Don College has been struggling for many years with its deteriorating infrastructure. It appears that the government has focused its year 11, 12, capital spending in the past with high schools, with colleges left to cope as best they can.

And I'm not sure if other members find this in their area, but what can you do to ensure Don College's decades-old relocatable classrooms, its dissolving plumbing and waste pipes, the crumbling 50-year-old light fittings which result in a regular emergency call out for repairs, is at least brought up to expected standards.

PUBLIC

I must add that its locally made 50-year-old carpets with their 1970 patterns are as vibrant as ever. If only the rest of the college was as durable. And I must admit, that was my first year at Don College - was when it opened. It needs an upgrade, I tell you.

Ms PALMER - Yes. No, thank you very much. I've certainly visited Don College and can relate to some of those circumstances that you've raised, including the carpet. Extraordinary quality, but vibrant indeed. But I will pass to deputy secretary, Mr Salter.

Mr SALTER - Thank you, minister. So firstly, all schools and colleges have a base level of funding to address regular maintenance issues as and when they arise. In addition, the department also supports sites with their maintenance matters with centrally held funding.

In recent years, Don College has been supported with various maintenance works including recent significant electrical switchboard upgrades. And the department will continue to support Don College on its needs. I can also advise that Don College is benefiting from the external sports court upgrade through the government's \$10 million playground and courts program, and that upgrade is in progress.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. And the relocatable classrooms are just going to stay there as they have been for the last 35 years, 40 years? I thought there was - when there was a number of expansions, relocatable classrooms were placed all over the place and found to be not very environmentally friendly, warm, all that sort of thing. So there's nothing in the line in the future?

Mr SALTER - So to answer that question generally then, I mean there's an annual process for capital submissions and priorities to be assessed.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

Mr SALTER - That information goes to government on an annual basis, and the government makes decisions against those allocations and the priorities within that.

Mr GAFFNEY - And just last question here. Are the colleges separate to the secondary schools or the high schools? They were all in the one - - -

Ms PALMER - In the one.

Mr SALTER - They're all assessed regardless of the sector that they're within.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do we have any other questions on capital investment? Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - I mean, it's in the budget papers, but I'm interested in the - and we actually asked the same question last year about Lindisfarne North that moved back 12 months, and I've seen this budget papers boot back another 12 months. I'm just wondering, can we anticipate that it's not going to move back another 12 months in 12 months?

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Ms PALMER - Yes. Certainly, my expectation is that it is where it is.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. And again, we're all pretty parochial about this sort of stuff, but Clarence High School, I see there's been a change to the flow of money there and some of it's actually come forward. I'm just interested, does that mean, potentially, that that's ahead of schedule now?

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

Mr SALTER - In terms of those changed cash flows, that reflects the updated position and that earlier timing than had previously been the case.

Mr EDMUNDS - And I guess when we hit things earlier, it might bring other things forward. Pretty please.

Ms PALMER - We are always trying to hit things on time. As everyone in this room well knows, there are often factors far beyond our control that push things out or move things forward. But it is always exciting when a project can be moved forward.

Mr EDMUNDS - Is that around workforce availability or is it budget reallocation? Obviously, I haven't gone line by line through this to see which ones have moved around where, but is it a workforce thing or is it more budgetary?

Mr SALTER - Through you, minister. So the government looks at the capital program overall and what's realistic for market as well as looking at its financial capacity within each year. So it's multiple factors in terms of where the projects have landed, but being considered on a holistic basis by government.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. And so do we think that the 2024-25 School Building Blitz Program, when it was first sort of put in place, was that realistic at the time or was it always probably inevitable that it was going to end up having some of these promised school upgrades bumped? Sorry, that's probably more a question for the minister. Apologies.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it's probably more a question that sits with me. Look, it was a decision that was made at a point in time that it would be an election commitment.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, it's supported. Yes.

Ms PALMER - There was a great amount of confidence around the audit process that the department has around letting us as a government know these are the priority schools where you need to have a real focus. So it was a commitment that we would fund the 15 schools that were on the priority ranking list at number 1 through that.

Mr EDMUNDS - And just one more, if it's all right. That ranking list, is that something that - we've seen it previously, I can't remember if it was here or in a PAC maybe, but are we able to see an updated, what the updated list looks like in June 2026?

Ms PALMER - Yes, the most recent list is publicly available on the website, but what I will say is that we're still going through the process of finalising the current list. So the one

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that's on the website has been there for some time, but the new priority ranking list is still going through the final process.

The intended commitment is that that will go to schools - because they wait for this - before the end of term two and then it will be available publicly. And I'm happy to table that in other forums once that is available.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Cool. Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could just ask you, minister, with regard to Glendhu Primary School and the works that are occurring there, obviously we have campus redevelopment and site upgrades, but the traffic and safety, the major redesign of the traffic management, walkways, parking areas following the decommissioning of the old school pool.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - And personally, I've been lobbying for a long time with regard to the traffic and safety, particularly with regard to drop off and collection. Can you just give me an idea of where it's all at?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we certainly can. That was a commitment that was made in conjunction with the decommissioning of the pool, which was a very hard decision to make. You and I are very aware of how sensitive our community was to that. Most of us have learnt to swim in it and our kids have learnt to swim in it. But I will pass to the department for more details with regard to fixing the issues with the entrance to the school.

CHAIR - No. Thank you, minister.

Mr SALTER - No. Thank you, minister, through you. So architects have been appointed and the construction tender has been released for those undertaking general learning area and the traffic and car park improvements. Construction is expected to commence soon and be completed in late 2027.

CHAIR - Thank you. If we have no further questions in this output, minister, we will pause the - we'll stop the broadcast, please, and give you a chance

The Committee suspended from 12.13 p.m. to 12.23 p.m.

Output Group 4.1

Services for Children and Families

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. If we just go into our next output, which is Minister for Children and Youth. We'll start with 4.1: Services for Children and Families. If you would like to introduce your team at the table, and if you have a short overview before we start questioning, that's fine as well.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. I'll just introduce the team at the table: Ginna Webster directly to my left, Secretary, Department of Education, Children and Young People; I also have Mr Peter Whitcombe, Deputy Secretary, Child Safety and Youth Justice

Operations to my right; and to his right, Ms Tiffany Black, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to just make some opening statements here. Since we last met, I've continued in my role as Minister for Children and Youth, leading work that is fundamentally about improving outcomes for children, young people, and families across Tasmania. I feel very privileged to lead this important work.

At the centre of this work are children and young people themselves, and I also want to acknowledge the staff across child safety, out-of-home care, and Youth Justice. Their work is often complex and challenging, and their professionalism is critical to seeing the outcomes we are seeing.

Strengthening front-line services remains a focus for this government. Implementing the recommendations of the commission of inquiry remains a central priority, but I want to be clear: this is not about simply marking recommendations as complete; it is about delivering the commission of inquiry recommendations' intent and embedding sustained, meaningful change across the system. That is how we continue to rebuild trust and to ensure that children are safe.

Over the past 12 months, we have made solid progress which I will share with the committee today. Importantly, we are continuing to place children, young people, and families at the centre of decision-making. Structural changes within child safety and Youth Justice in the Department of Education, Children and Young People have strengthened our ability to deliver thorough care and more integrated services.

The commission of inquiry recommendations Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-34 and Uplifting Care strategy continues to guide system reform, setting a clear direction towards a more therapeutic, child rights-based and integrated system.

In this Budget, the government has committed \$41.556 million to key children and youth initiatives, reinforcing our focus on ensuring every child is known, safe, well, and learning. We are also maintaining our commitment to the new Tasmanian Youth Justice facility, with continued investment of \$142.4 million in the 2026-27 Budget and forwards.

We're placing greater emphasis on early intervention by supporting families earlier to prevent escalation, and this includes an additional \$15 million over 2 years for out-of-home care, aligned with commission of inquiry recommendations.

The role our foster and kinship carers play is an integral part of the care system, and I deeply appreciate all the work that they do when welcoming young people into their homes and ensuring their wellbeing and safety. This is why the government is continuing to support our foster and kinship carers with an investment of \$2 million in 2026-27 towards ongoing uplift of foster and kinship carer allowances as part of an \$8 million 4-year commitment.

We also acknowledge the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the system. Addressing this remains a priority. We are continuing to strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver culturally-appropriate, place-based services. This partnership allows greater decision-making by ACCOs on the issues that directly impact Aboriginal children and young people.

Chair, I anticipate the committee will be focused on progress, accountability, and outcomes, and I welcome that focus. We are seeing change, but I am also very clear that there is more to do. It is my expectation as Minister for Children and Youth that the current momentum continues. My commitment is to continue driving reform and ensuring that children and young people are safe, that families are supported, and that the system is delivering the outcomes Tasmanians expect and deserve. I look forward to answering the committee's questions. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. We'll start with some overview questions. I have Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I'm just following up. We did do some overview questions for the department broadly before Education, but there might be some other elements to add for these areas we're going to cover this afternoon around children and families in those areas. If I could just run back through them, the first one was about any external consultancies that related to these areas that you wanted to give us a list of and details of.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you. The information this morning was the whole of agency, and many of those were for child safety and Youth Justice.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That covers the external consultancies and the IT or digital infrastructure. Did it also cover the Closing the Gap responsibilities or updates on progress there? I think we just did Education this morning.

Ms WEBSTER - Mr Whitcombe would have some updates on Closing the Gap for this portfolio.

Ms WEBB - Just broadly, because Mr Whitcombe wasn't here this morning, I was just asking about updates on the Closing the Gap initiative responsibilities in this areas and for an update on progress.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I'll start with a highlight, Ms Webb. The secretary and I were able to meet with TAC, which was the culmination of a huge amount of work, signing a partnership agreement on 2 April, and that partnership agreement is a really strong signal from both parties around our enduring commitment to work together at all levels and to have impact when it comes to reducing the disparity that exists for Aboriginal children. Alongside that relationship agreement sits a contract or a range of commission services right across child safety work, family finding, intensive responses for families, and then Youth Justice.

I'm really excited, and I feel really honoured and privileged, actually, to have a team that is partnering right across Aboriginal organisations in Tasmania. There's active work going on with 8 ACCOs at the moment, and we're moving from a place where a very small proportion of our budget, just looking back sort of a year and a half ago, was prioritised for those organisations to a place where, in the next financial year, that investment well over tripling. It will be over \$6 million for the next financial year invested into Aboriginal services.

Ms WEBB - Great. That's really positive to hear, and I'm presuming that that partnership agreement that you've signed, would that be the first time that that's occurred between this department and an ACCO in this state?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Great. I'm presuming that that's going to then underpin a whole range of work on implementing commission of inquiry recommendations, because there's such a variety of those that relate to activities and initiatives that must be in partnership with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Does that form a foundation now to build on for the implementation of those?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes, I think it does, but what I would say is that unique to particular communities, to particular Aboriginal organisations, they are going to have their own aspirations and desires within their communities.

Over the last year and a half, initially through the work that DPAC led, there's been the emergence of an Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy. It was a commission of inquiry recommendation, and our first draft, if I'm really upfront, really felt like it was an Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy that was being written by government for the Aboriginal community. We got some really strong and constructive feedback through that process.

We're working through at the moment wanting to release what that looks like, but it is about listening and acting together and government being an enabler to the aspirations, recognising that there will be many strategies. An example of us being an enabler in a unique way is actually the TAC contract, which pools together funding from the Commonwealth, from DPAC, and from our own agency and is making it more straightforward for those organisations to navigate and work alongside government.

Ms WEBB - Sounds particularly positive. Thank you for that update. Appreciate it. Were there any particular Closing the Gap projects or initiatives that needed to be updated on? Obviously, what you've just described is a very broad and overarching underpinning for that. Is there anything else to highlight, just while we're creating a record of it?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I think the other foundational pieces go to the work that's been undertaken to establish the office of the Aboriginal executive director. We haven't landed that office, but we've initiated the process of recruitment to that office. From an internal agency perspective, growing our capability and our capacity from a cultural safety perspective and cultural responsiveness perspective, I think it's going to have a really strong impact within the agency.

There's still so much to do. You know, the numbers around children in care for Aboriginal children, and certainly in terms of youth justice overrepresentation, we have to do much better, and it is through communities, it's through partnering, it's through investing that we're going to achieve those things.

Ms WEBB - Thanks for that.

CHAIR - Thank you. If we have no further questions in the Overview, I will ask you - it's almost an Overview question but it still fits into our first line item - you mentioned kinship carers in the overview, and I think it was an extra \$2 million. Just wondering, so what is the government doing to support the foster and kinship carers with the ongoing costs of raising

children while they're in their care? We all know how difficult that can be for many carers and grandparents and others.

Ms PALMER - Yes, and we also know that, you know, if a young person can't be with their family, you know, this is a great option for them. Our foster and kinship care is certainly an essential part of the Tasmanian care system, opening their homes, and indeed their lives, to children and young people and providing stability, safety and of course, the opportunity to experience, you know, really positive and nurturing environments.

As Minister for Children and Youth I deeply value the contribution foster and kinship carers make to the lives of children, young people and families, and it was great to meet many of them when I had the opportunity to attend their main conference I think it was last year.

In September 2025 the government delivered a 15 per cent increase to the base rate of foster and kinship carer payments, and in the 2026-27 we are building on that commitment with an investment of \$8 million over four years to continue that uplift. These payments contribute directly to the everyday needs of children and young people. That's including food, clothing, education, and, of course, you know, general expenses that come with participating in community life.

Importantly, this support sits alongside broader investment to strengthen the child safety system, because we know carers must be backed by a responsive child safety system. This dedicated investment reduces pressure on our foster and kinship carers by ensuring that they are supported by skilled professionals so improved outcome for children and young people are achieved.

And these actions are aligned with the recommendations of the commission of inquiry, which emphasised the importance of a care system that is not a one-size-fits-all approach and is able to respond to the individual care needs of each child and young person within the care system.

For some children and young people, support through foster and kinship carers provides care while they are unable to remain in their family home, and by investing in financial support for carers and in the care system that surrounds them, our government is ensuring that children and young people in care are safe, that they are supported and, you know, that they are able to thrive. We'll continue to back foster and kinship carers because, you know, we know that when we support them we are directly supporting children and young people who are relying on them every day.

CHAIR - No, thank you. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Got follow-ups on that.

CHAIR - Follow-up?

Ms WEBB - I've got follow-ups on that same area if you want to stick with that area.

CHAIR - I was going to go to out-of-home care, but if you want to follow up on kinship carers.

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Ms WEBB - I mean, it's out-of-home care. Yes. The uplift that's there, the \$2 million that was there, I think, last year, and then we're rolling that out further, can you give a breakdown of how that's allocated across foster care, across kinship care and whether there's any there for also an uplift in respite care allocations for people who are involved in that?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll just seek some advice on that. Thank you very much. We've got some information that the secretary can share. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. That 2.012 million per year is the continuation of just the base - it's 15 per cent on the base rate of support payments for all carers, all foster carers across the year, so it's just a 15 per cent across-the-board increase for those foster and kinship carers.

Ms WEBB - Can I check in about that, then, given it's a flat rate across forward Estimates, that's -

Ms PALMER - Into the base.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Into the base, yes.

Ms WEBB - Is the base being indexed, then, each year? Because obviously the uplift isn't being indexed each year, so therefore are we actually seeing, effectively - you know, so I'm not criticising that we're uplifting it by any means. I'm just asking about if it's 15 per cent this year, is it only going to be 12-and-a-half per cent the year after, and, you know, because it's not keeping pace with that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Yes, my advice is that the base is indexed each year.

Ms WEBB - So we'll be able to maintain that? Anyway, that's okay.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask, then, to just clarify about respite care and whether the amounts for respite care are also being uplifted? Because my understanding is that's a very modest amount of money that is available for people, who are fantastic people providing respite care in their homes, but not necessarily for a particularly large amount of money, and I presume we might have trouble recruiting people into these spaces, and this might be one of the reasons that might help people be encouraged if we were actually reimbursing appropriately.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. I'll ask deputy secretary Mr Whitcombe to answer that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister. There's a range of questions in there, and I'll do my best to touch on those. Personally, just to absolutely confirm, there was an indexation, for example, of 3.5 per cent to reflect the cost of living growth in terms of the budget for out-of-home care. In total, we have in the financial year ahead \$138 million invested for out-of-home care.

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And you may well be aware that consistently it is an out-of-home care that we have struggled to live with in the budget that we've been given, and consistently it needed to, you know, utilise RAFs in order to prop that funding up. The funding being provided, in an upfront way, fundamentally changes our ability to plan from a continuing with care perspective, what it is from a care options perspective that is needed into the future. Our commissioning and partnerships team are actively working on what that will look like in the year ahead.

Where we've been is we often end up quite reactively needing to set up quite expensive care options, but had we been able to invest and partner with organisations, we would already have those care options available. When it comes to the supports for kinship and family caregivers, confirming that the 15 per cent uplift doesn't relate to respite care, but what we do is a needs-based assessment around the complexity of the child, and there are levels of care and there is flexibility within our board payments to reflect the complexity of the children that they're caring for.

CHAIR - Thank you. I might just continue on with my questioning, if that was all right, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - That's okay. I had a particular -

CHAIR - On out-of-home care or -

Ms WEBB - This particular issue was raised with me for asking a question about, because if I was a respite carer for a weekend, the base rate, I understand, is about \$107 that I'd get for the two days of the weekend, which is not very much. And you've just said you can get more than that, potentially, but how is that assessed and how do people know about having that assessed in order to potentially access a more appropriate amount for that care that's given across a weekend, for example?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. There are four levels that will be assessed through the child safety officer in conjunction with the out-of-home care practitioner. It can be a conversation that occurs with the caregivers, and, you know, if there are particular situations that we're able to respond to, really happy for you to raise them out of session.

Ms WEBB - Minister, is there any reason we didn't apply the 15 per cent lift to respite carers when we gave it to foster carers and kinship carers?

Ms PALMER - I think there was a commitment to foster and kinship carers. And as the deputy secretary has outlined, they're conversations that can be had, and there's four tiers or four levels with regard to respite care.

Ms WEBSTER - Just an addition and through you, minister. The work that we're doing on the uplift and care reform is considering the respite carer payment. That is part of the financial work that we're doing as the ongoing work for uplift and care.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm sure we'll talk more about that too. Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll just back to my first question for this line item. The Budget states that the increase in appropriation revenue and associated expenses in the 25-26 estimated

outcome reflects the estimated additional expenditure for the out-of-home care and the advice and referral line. And that's budget paper 2 and bill 1, page 28.

Is the increase in out-of-home care - and you've explained there's some money. Is the funding primarily driven by rising placement numbers and increase in placement cost, or is it to some extent a greater complexity of the children's needs?

Ms PALMER - It's both, I think. But for more details I'll pass - if you're happy, secretary - to the deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. In the last year we did have an increase - an average increase of 54 children above the previous years average number. So total care numbers, on average, at 1004, year to date through to March this year. In terms of the complexity question, absolutely.

The complexity that we're seeing, particularly around both disability and mental health issues that are going on for children and young people are really significant, and that has led to an increase in the use of salary care packages, or individualised responses for those children.

That is notwithstanding we are needing to focus our energy and efforts in building more foster carers, more homelike places for children. And when it comes to kinship care, that is often the very best place for a child to be. And so increasing our ability to work with families and the family finding space to grow the numbers of kinships carers that we have for children as a focus in the year ahead as well.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt?

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Just following up on those numbers. In budget paper 4, page 36, it was 23-24 around 950, 24-25 around 950. So you're saying this year is looking more like 1000.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - The target for this year was 900. Obviously, you'd want that data to be going down, not up. But the year afterwards it's at 950. Is what's been allocated in the Budget sufficient for the target you've got at 950, or is it sufficient for what is likely to be an increasing number, not a decreasing number.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We did the modelling for the Budget based on what we were expecting this financial year, so it's based on the high figure of 1000.

Mr HISCUTT - The target, though, here is 950 next year. How do you reconcile - you've budgeted for - well, just trying to get less, I guess, is what you're trying to explain with that. That's all right. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I'm really happy to talk to that. That's really important in our work that we are doing everything that we possibly can to keep the children safe within their families, within their homes, within their communities. And there's a range of things that we are doing to support that. Certainly, initiatives like our Intensive Family Engagement Service and Bringing Baby Home have a significant role to play.

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But we too, in terms of our decision-making and our practice ability, are investing in things like helping out our workforce grow in their understanding of family group conferencing practices. We are investing in those Aboriginal-led responses that I've talked about earlier.

We know, in particular, that the investment into every child having a key worker leads to better care planning, and you should always have a goal when it comes to a child in care, and where is that long-term permanent place going to be. Is it a return home goal, is it to remain, is it a transition to independence?

And having a key worker for every child puts us in a different position for us to have very active planning and responses happening for children so that they're not drifting while they're in care. We are setting up what we call a return home team, or a third-party guardianship team.

We know that there are a number of children across the state that have lagged in terms of that care planning, and if we have a team that specifically focuses in that area, we're going to achieve some really significant drops of numbers of children in care as a total.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Appreciate the answer.

CHAIR - Thank you. Now, I just have one more question before I pass to other members of the team. Just wondering, what's the current vacancy rate across child safety services, if I could. Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - I believe we've got that information at the table.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. For our child safety workforce we, as of today, are 0.6 of an FTE shy of our total FTE. That's in the child safety officer workforce. Parts of the state are slightly over. Our north and north-west are slightly over, and in the south we're slightly under. I'll touch on the ARL.

We do have about six vacancies, at the moment, in the advice and referral line. But I want to be clear, as well. A recruitment process has been undertaken. Through that recruitment process we received a huge amount of applications and we've provided 25 of those letters of offer and we've had 23 accepted.

We've got a range of staff starting between now and the end of the financial year and some further staff starting at the start of the new financial year, which is going to bring us right up to - actually, beyond what we've been allocated this financial year.

CHAIR - And can you just tell me the case load ratio, because I think that's always interesting, obviously, with the number of staff that you have. But what is their case load ratio?

Ms PALMER - Yes. We certainly can.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. As of today, the case load average across the service is 15.2. And if we were to -

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CHAIR - Is that considered best practice? That would be -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Fifteen, from an international perspective, is about there or thereabouts. It's certainly not at the bad end of the spectrum. It's the good end of the spectrum. We wouldn't want to go beyond 15. We do see 15 as a bit of a marker that provokes conversations between a practice leader and the practitioner around their workload, so it is important that we keep growing our workforce. But from a good news perspective, we have the order of 360 more children allocated than when we did a year and a half ago.

CHAIR - Right. And your turnover of staff?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Our turnover rate for our child safety workforce is 16.1 per cent. We had 20 of our practitioners leave in the last year long period out of about 120 total.

CHAIR - And the main reason? Did they give an exit advice of why they've left, the main reason? Going somewhere else that's similar or private practice, or is it because stress -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I think there's a range of -

CHAIR - Just an indication of the workforce?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. I think there's a range of reasons. We have seen an improvement at the rates of - so what you don't want to see is people coming in and leaving really quickly. We've seen a reduction in that rate of coming and then leaving quickly. That's reduced this year compared to the previous year. In terms of the range of reasons, I don't want to speculate too much, but it can relate to the nature of the role, it can relate to the line manager that they might have, or it can relate to a change in personal circumstances. There's a whole lot of reasons that people move on.

CHAIR - And my final question on the workforce. Just the workers compensation, if we could just have some figures on workers compensation. And I think as we've been asking before, the breakdown between musculoskeletal and psychological. It's just always an interesting one.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. From a workers compensation perspective right across the portfolio, in our child safety workforce we've got 32 currently on workers comp.

CHAIR - Yes. I'm thinking child safety.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. And I've got the numbers for youth justice once we get there.

CHAIR - That's a totally separate side of thing. Just the child safety; so 32. And can you divide that between musculoskeletal and psychological?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I could get the breakdown. I know that we have the data, but if we could come back to that.

CHAIR - If we can. Certainly. Happy for you to come back to that.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Some follow-ups on that.

CHAIR - Yes, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I just wanted to circle back to the caseloads for the child safety officers. We had a discussion last year about it. I'm just wanting to check if 15.2 sounds similar. I think last year we might have talked about 14.8, something like that. So we've just gone up a little.

So I'm just going to check the number this year that you've given me. In those parameters we discussed last year, where we're excluding anyone who's on leave or the people who are actually working, and the number of caseload - the caseload they actually have in their responsibility at this present time.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. So we don't have a system that essentially has relief workers come in while people are on leave.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And I want to acknowledge that. And usually that's picked up through the team.

Ms WEBB - So the rest of the staff pick up the load.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, that's fair to say. And that's a typical way of practising, because there is -

Ms WEBB - It's probably appropriate. You don't want people coming in and out of this space.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Typically the team is going to know the children and the families that are involved. So yes, it does fit those parameters. And we did our modelling for new workers and the investment that we've achieved over the next four years in new workers based around between 12 and 13 as a caseload for those practitioners.

Ms WEBB - And can you give me a regional breakdown of the caseloads? I presume the 15.2 is the statewide figure.

Ms PALMER - We'll get that for you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I can confirm it is a statewide figure, and I'll pass to the secretary for the data.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. So through you, minister. I've got the data for workers compensation while we get that other figure. So there were 23 new workers compensation claims across this portfolio between 1 April and 31 March, 19 related to psychological injuries

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and 4 related to physical injuries. So the majority - I can't remember who asked that question now.

CHAIR - It was myself.

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry. The majority of those were psychological injuries.

CHAIR - Thank you. They are certainly increasing, aren't they, workers compensation.

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek if we can get that breakdown.

Ms WEBB - So the regional breakdown.

CHAIR - Yes. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We will come back with the regional breakdown because certainly there are regional differences

Ms WEBB - Come back to us with that. That's fine. Yes, that's what I imagined, and I just wanted to be clear about what that was because that obviously outlines what your challenge is around staffing statewide differences.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt just had a follow up question. Unless you're on the same - - -

Ms WEBB - I had some more data questions that relate to a very similar area relating to caseload in a way.

CHAIR - Well, Mr Hiscutt's on workers compensation.

Mr HISCUTT - My one's workers comp. So we're sort of on both of them at the moment.

Ms WEBB - Okay.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - I just wanted to confirm the question I asked earlier in the day about the total insurance premiums.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Is that the whole department, including here?

Ms WEBSTER - The whole department.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. No, that was all I wanted to confirm, that I don't need to ask that on each section.

Ms WEBSTER - No, it's the whole department.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - No. Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - That was all mine was. Sorry. Thanks, Meg - Ms Webb.

CHAIR - Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So the other data points I was looking for are proportion of children unallocated. And if you can provide that in a regional breakdown as well as a statewide.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I don't think this is today's number, but the recent number, and I think it's through the end of April, was 346 not allocated.

Ms WEBB - And can that be provided as a regional breakdown?

Mr WHITCOMBE - We can provide that, but we'll come back with that regional breakdown.

Ms WEBB - Come back. Yes. And then you're probably going to know the other data bits I'm looking for as well. Or do you have more to add on that unallocated? Please provide an explanation.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I do know that one of our pressure points in our service historically has been the north-west.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I equally know that the north-west now have the highest rate of allocation and that's a really huge turnaround in that particular area.

Ms WEBB - Good turnaround. We discussed last year, the efforts that we've been putting around that seat.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So the other thing I'm interested in is proportion of children with a care plan in place and whether we're on a trajectory in the right direction there as well. Look at all the wonderful chances I'm giving you to provide us with good news stories. Virtually Dorothy Dix's, aren't they.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, just to respond to the care plan. There's two data points that we get measured on when it comes to care planning. One is having a care plan.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And typically our measures are really high in that regard.

Ms WEBB - Yes, in the 90s.

Mr WHITCOMBE - They sit around 98 per cent.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - What we're really interested in is having a - - -

Ms WEBB - The more meaningful one. Yes. Is it up to date?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, it is up to date. And we've had a huge improvement in that area. We've got 69.5 per cent care plans at the moment that are up to date. Now, I know that that means that there's 30 per cent that are still not up to date.

Ms WEBB - That's gone up since, what? Was it 54 or something last year?

Ms WEBSTER - I think it was 47.

Ms WEBB - Forty-seven. There you go.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Ms WEBB - So it's a big improvement. Were you going to give me those figures regionally as well? Thank you. Sorry, you wanted to make some more comments about that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I just want to acknowledge the staff and the work and the leadership. It's come off the back of really focused efforts in terms of our data and information becoming a lot more visible to each of our regional leaders, and us being clearer, I suppose, in our expectations.

But when people know what the ask is, and when that information is really readily available, it really makes a difference in terms of what we're able to achieve. And it is a mixture of focus and effort, but it's also increased recruitment and the ability to allocate and then the ability to respond in timely ways. So just in terms of the regional breakdown of care plan percentages.

Ms WEBB - The meaningful one - the up to date one? Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. So this is going back about a month and a half or so. So it's to 30 April. The north was at 53.2 per cent, the north-west was at 80.4 per cent, which reflects my comment, and the south was at 64.2 per cent.

Ms WEBB - That's great. It's really good to hear that those improvements are there. I really hope we sustain them and keep going in that trajectory.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I also have a response in relation to caseload sizes that you asked.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - So the average caseload size for the north-west is 13.5. In the south it's 16.8 and in the north it's 13.9. Those numbers directly correlate to where our vacancies have been sitting from a workforce perspective.

Ms WEBB - Right. What's your vacancy then in the south? Because that's obviously where your pressure point is at the moment.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes. In the south it is approximately five, so we've got 4.6 FTE below. As I did say earlier, we've had a successful recruitment round. Twenty-five letters of offer have gone out and 23 have been accepted and a significant number of those are going to be focused in the south.

Ms WEBB - Right. So they'll come on board in the next short while - is anticipated.

Ms PALMER - There's some coming on board at the end of the year and others at the beginning of next year.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And then there's just one other area then around that basic data stuff that is useful to have, I think, on the record here, these nice updates that we're getting this year on the detail we talked about last year. The visits within required time frames data, and again, statewide, but then a regional breakdown figure on those.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. As at 30 April, and again, I know that this number is improving month on month at the moment, but it was 51.7 per cent within time frames as a total across the state for visits. The north was 56.9 per cent. The north-west was again standing out at 66.8 per cent and the south was at 41.2 per cent.

Ms WEBB - Great. Thank you. I appreciate that.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney has a question.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. Thank you. My question's about support services with psychologists that support children, youth and families, and it's always been an area that we've never had heaps of psychologists available and waiting times are quite long. So my question is about, in relation to the department's operational efficiency targets, what measures are being taken to ensure that child or youth access to psychology services is not adversely affected, and what reduction in school or private psychology wait times does the government expect or hope to achieve over the next 12 months? I'll wait till I hear the answer, and then the next question will be about training and qualifications, that sort of thing.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Thank you for the question. I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. Again, we would want to protect those services that go directly to children and young people. In this portfolio, we want to make sure that we get the numbers that we need when we've got some additional funding, particularly around our child safety service.

We wouldn't be looking to take what we would determine as directly providing services to children and young people and their families. The school psychologist question is probably more from the Education portfolio, so the waitlists are school waitlists, not in this space. It's up

to the minister as to whether or not we provide the answer. I've got it, if you want me to provide the education data.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. I wasn't sure how it works with children out of school and in-school utilising those services. I wasn't quite sure of that relationship.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. There is a great opportunity with the department being brought together to make sure that the right people are in the room when we need it and that information sharing and the work that we're doing, particularly at the executive level, and I think Mr Whitcombe mentioned this yesterday.

It's an absolutely live conversation within the department about how we can make sure that our vulnerable children and families are getting the support we need and the information is being shared, because often the schools are the place that know those children best. The work that we're doing in the portfolio is around making sure that there's that cross-pollination, if you like, and collaboration between schools and between child safety and Youth Justice.

When we have regional meetings or state-wide meetings, for example, we will have Education Services in the room to discuss these things to make sure that anything we're setting up actually includes Education, that we're working as a whole, not working in silos, and I think that's the key.

From a practical perspective, Mr Whitcombe might be able to give you some examples, and I've got the information on psychologist wait times. School psychology changes in wait times over a 12-month period are difficult to predict; however, recent data indicates a 10 per cent reduction in therapy wait times and a marginal 0.0246 decrease for assessments.

Wait times in education settings are not directly comparable to health or medical models as they're shaped by multiple contextual factors, such as student need, type of support system processes, and service availability.

Average wait times can be influenced by complex student circumstances, for example, family safety issues or non-attendance, which may delay engagement with services. The agency's approach prioritises delivering a broad range of learning and wellbeing supports based on identified need. Students continue to receive support and interventions while awaiting assessment.

Wait times differ between service types, with assessment timelines distinct from those for counselling or therapy, and a multi-tiered service model enables prioritisation of urgent and complex cases to ensure timely support where it's needed most.

The pending teachers agreement includes provision for an additional 7 FTE school psychologists to increase assessment capacity, and while additional resourcing will support improvements, reduction in wait lists are also expected to occur over time, with an initial effort focused on addressing the existing wait lists.

Mr GAFFNEY - Have you got a regional breakdown of where those vacancies might be? You said 7. It's one of the ones at -

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Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. What we're looking at is a hub that actually can address really quickly the wait list. We're establishing a state-wide school psychology and assessment team with those additional 7 FTE that will be dedicated to reduce them long term.

Ms PALMER - These are new positions.

Ms WEBSTER - They're brand-new positions.

Mr GAFFNEY - And you work with UTAS to make sure there's a supply of psychologists graduating after a 6-year program?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, absolutely. I haven't got the data with me, but I understand we have provided scholarships and those sorts of incentives in the past. We had 8 school psychology scholarships awarded this year, with 5 recipients commencing work in our schools in 2025, and further commencing in term 1, 2026.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's excellent.

Ms WEBSTER - But it is an area that we know is in need for our students.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you for that information.

Ms PALMER - I will just say, Mr Gaffney, with regard to that new assessment team, the state-wide school psychology assessment team, that is specifically dedicated to looking at these wait lists and to reducing those long wait times. As the secretary mentioned, children who are on those wait lists are not going without any support.

Mr GAFFNEY - Very good. Thank you.

CHAIR - Did you have another question before the lunch break, Ms Webb?

Ms WEBB - I can try.

CHAIR - If you don't, that's fine.

Ms WEBB - I have a million questions. Would you like me to try and find one that's shortish?

CHAIR - Yes, please.

Ms WEBB - In the key deliverables in the budget paper, we've got the child safety workforce incentives that were in this year's Budget, 2026-27, and 2027-28, \$1.5 million each year. I'm just wanting to check how that's been divided up. Is that going to be all for CSOs, or is that actually some for ARLs, some for CSOs, et cetera? Can you divide that up for me?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. It is across those workforces that you mentioned and inclusive of Youth Justice as well. Because that allocation is to support a transition from our current agreement, which has a range of different awards underpinning it, but also different incentives that exist.

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We are currently engaged in a process with HACSU and CPSU in order to establish a single agreement for our workforce. We're working through qualification pathways and classification structures, and ultimately what currently exists determining what is appropriate to travel through into the future agreement as well, but we're in the middle of negotiations.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Just to be clear, this is to tide us over until that new agreement comes into play. Are we expecting that to come into play in 2028-29?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes. As we're in active negotiations, I'm hopeful that it would be 6 to 8 months that we would hopefully finalise that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. At the moment, in terms of how we're dividing that incentive money up across those work areas, are you able to give me a quick breakdown of that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. This is high level, and you may want more specific information, but typically we've had an allocation of about \$1 million to specific learning and development opportunities, and it supports our work with the likes of UTAS and TasTAFE but also supports professional development opportunities to really be available across our workforce, and then the further funding in there covers things like recruitment incentives and cost of relocation. There's a particular incentive for the north-west, and it covers a range of those additional negotiated incentives.

Ms WEBB - We don't necessarily divide it up at this much for ARL-related, this much for out-of-home care-related, this for child safety officers, this much for Youth Justice; it's more that we put it into buckets, whether it's training, whether it's recruitment, and that applies to all those different job types within that. I think I'm getting a nod to say 'yes'.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, absolutely.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - I think there's further information that's just coming here.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. If you would like more specific information, going back budget years, there was a \$4.2 million workforce package over two years, and it included the likes of one-off payments of \$10,000 for eligible allied health professionals. These payments increased by up to \$30,000 for eligible child safety employees in the north-west region, and that was to do with the 15 per cent market alliance, and as I mentioned before, the relocation incentives as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Appreciate that detail. I can move onto something else, but I'm mindful we're close to break time.

CHAIR - I think it's close to break time. If we take a break and we return at 2.15. If we could stop the broadcast, please.

The committee suspended from 1.13 p.m. to 2.15 p.m.

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CHAIR - Thank you, minister, and good to be back. We will continue with questioning on 4.1, which is Services for Children and Families, and with a view to moving to 4.2 by 3.15 at the latest. Okay. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair, I appreciate that. One of the things I'm interested to talk a little bit about is the move of the commission of inquiry recommendation implementation coordination, and what's moved from DPAC to this department, and I'm interested to hear from you about how that's now going to be structured in terms of responsibilities and governance and what, if anything, is changing on that front, particularly around reporting and monitoring.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. We'll just get some information for you.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The plan would be for those staff engaged in the whole-of-government commission of inquiry evaluation monitoring to come to the Department for Education, Children and Young People, so the money and the staff will come.

Ms WEBB - Okay. The staff come across, great.

Ms WEBSTER - Currently what we do within the department is the monitoring and implementation oversight of our commission of inquiry recommendations sit within the office of the secretary, which is led by the director of my office, and then we have staff within that unit in my office who then go out to the business units, predominantly child safety and youth justice, and then education around how we're progressing towards the implementation of our recommendations.

When those people come over from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the plan will be they'll come into that unit, but they'll actually be doing us that separate function, still. So as much as possible, remaining that continuity of service. And the process for overseeing the implementation of whole-of-government recommendations will still be with cabinet and still be with a cabinet sub-committee.

In effect, it will just move as a unit, as a whole to the department. The majority of the recommendations obviously sit within this department, but the monitoring, the website, as my understanding, that won't change.

We're still working through the technicalities and the logistics of the machinery of government move, but the plan would be that we would try to separate the two roles, if you like, our implementation of our recommendations, and then overseeing the implementation and providing advice on the monitoring of the whole-of-government recommendations.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that description, I appreciate it. Then in terms of that, and also in the context of operational efficiencies and what the Budget is presenting us with, what impact, if any, is there on implementation timelines and on our expectations about how we move forward with that?

Ms WEBSTER - At this stage, well, there's no impact on the implementation of the recommendations. Our recommendations, speaking for the Department of Education, Children and Young People, are still on track, and obviously there's many that have already been delivered. In terms of the financial arrangements in the Budget, some of those line items do end because the implementation ends and it becomes a business as usual.

I think we would just look at where the work is absorbed into the business unit versus there's a resource and there's a role for someone to monitor and oversight the implementation. Obviously there's also the work that we currently do with the implementation monitor and working with him and his office, and we work really closely with him anyway.

I regularly meet with him, Mr Whitcombe regularly meets with him, so that work will remain as it is, and providing the information that we need to provide to him from our perspective, our recommendations, but also the ones that belong to the whole of government.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. We have, though, potentially pushed out some timelines on recommendations already.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Has anything been moved in that space in recent times? Is there an expectation that there'll be some sort of review or some sort of assessment as things come over to you and into this department's responsibility, that there's a re-look at timelines, and any suggestion it might be rejigged?

Ms PALMER - I think where you'll see that there has been an adjustment of a timeline, those decisions have been made in conjunction with the independent monitor, and, you know, one of the things that Mr Benjamin is absolutely adamant about is - and we are, too - is about not just ticking a box with regard to recommendations; it's absolutely about seeing cultural change, and sometimes that can take longer, and, you know, than just the date that's been set for a recommendation of the commission of inquiry. Also there was the reshuffling, because some of the recommendations didn't naturally flow with the timelines that had been put there, and again, we worked with Mr Benjamin on that.

To be clear, there has been no cut to commission of inquiry funding, and our expectation is if there were any changes that need to be made once the machinery of government changes occur, we will be very open and transparent about that. We will work with Mr Benjamin and others around that. We don't want to see any delays for any reason other than that will result in a better outcome. We're pretty set on that.

Ms WEBSTER - Also through you, minister, the intention is still to continue with the biannual reporting and the ministerial oversight that the minister mentioned, and accountability. I think our role, the recommendations that we're implementing, as we've said, they remain on track, and we're a hundred per cent committed to those.

Our work with those other agencies now as part of that oversight would be to continue that work to make sure that they're progressing their recommendations to be able to provide that information to cabinet and the minister around making sure that they're still on track, so it'd be bringing all of that together, but we -

Ms PALMER - And there is a -

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry.

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Ms PALMER - Sorry, secretary. There is the Keeping Children Safe sub-cabinet committee, which I chair, that has the relevant ministers around the table, and the premier is also on that as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Just for that governance and accountability at that cabinet level.

Ms WEBB - When you described the funding and the staffing unit coming across from DEPAC to this department, can you provide a list of roles that are there and amounts of money that are attached to that unit shifting as well, just as a -

Ms PALMER - Thank you. Yes, we can get that.

Ms WEBB - That's fine; when you're ready. Thank you. I can keep going, if you want to go to someone else, though.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, I've got one. I think it's in the right place. It's been raised with me that there are concerns with the new Pontville facility model.

CHAIR - That's in Youth Justice. We're still on the -

Mr GAFFNEY - We're still in the other one?

CHAIR - Yes. Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Sorry.

CHAIR - No, that's all right.

Mr GAFFNEY - I was writing too much.

CHAIR - No, that's all right. You can ask that when we get to the next one. Do you have any further questions in this one?

Mr GAFFNEY - No.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt?

Ms WEBB - I'll keep going.

CHAIR - Ms Webb, great.

Ms WEBB - Minister, I'm interested in planned changes to ARL and the model used there, just to get a better understanding. I believe that yesterday you were asked about some of these things and you confirmed that there are changes there to our model.

From July there'll be a new model, and my understanding is - and you'll be able to correct me if I've misheard this - where callers into the ARL will either go in one of two directions to either a government employee if there's a risk of harm or neglect, like a child safety response, or to an NGO avenue for family support issues, so I presume that's, like, the IFSS and IEFSS programs, that side of things, and the Bringing Baby Home and those things.

No, Bringing Baby Home is probably a bit of both, isn't it? That sounds like going back to the sort of model we had before we put the ARL in place, in a way, so I'm just interested to hear a bit more about the intention of this new/old model coming into play, and I'm particularly interested to ask you some questions about that in terms of potential impact.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely, and I will pass to the deputy secretary, but I'll just make some opening comments and give a bit of background to how we have ended up here. A review of the ARL was undertaken in 2024, which found that the broad scope of the service created ambiguity in triage processes, contributed to rapid growth in the volume of contacts to the ARL and a reduction in decision-making capability for the staff. The review found opportunities to refine the scope of the service, more clearly define the responses to safety and wellbeing to enable efficient responses to each, and to strengthen alignment with the child safety service to support more direct face-to-face contact with children and families, especially during assessments.

So Professor Leah Bromfield and the Australian Centre for Child Protection, ACCP, were commissioned to bring their national expertise in child protection systems, intake models and service design to support the department's development of a new operating model for ARL. And work is now underway to transition to the new model from the first of July of this year.

So we are committed to prioritising the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Implementation of Commission of Inquiry recommendations guiding the focus on continuous improvement within the child safety out-of-home care systems. So I might pass to the deputy secretary to talk you through how we believe this will deliver better outcomes for children and young people and their families.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. And through you, minister. So again, if we were to go back and think about the context of the changes, we were at a time a year and a half ago where there were, there were huge backlogs to the tune of over 2000, and we've talked about that in previous committees.

At the moment we're able to say, well, we sit at a number between 0 and 20 on any given day in terms of matters that are awaiting allocation. We're also able to talk about a far stronger ability to be responsive to the phone calls that are coming in, in spite of really big increases in caller volume. And we've gone from an average between four and five minutes with a lot more calls that have fallen off or not picked up to a place of 33 seconds being our average wait time.

What we had found was that the original intent and purpose and vision of the reform was absolutely right. It was intended to have much stronger visibility and be very clear as a place for people to be able to access advice, support, and not just be about that hardline or child protection response at the top end of risk.

We want to hold to that original intent and purpose, but what was happening was we were finding that in achieving children not going through the Child Safety Service, there was

a lot of essentially case management activity that was occurring within the advice and referral line, but over the phone, not in people's homes, not connected to seeing and hearing and touching and feeling exactly what might be going on for people.

So we have been able to provide clearer guidance for our staff. We've been able to see times from the advice and referral line through to matters being referred to the Child Safety Service improve, and the intent of the family referral hubs or family hubs that we do intend to establish over a period of a couple of years is that they're the sort of hubs that can be embedded in, for example, a CFLC or an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, and become places that are part of their communities where there's really strong understanding of what's available locally - and communities - as opposed to sort of the centralised approach that is occurring.

I want to provide some assurance though. We're still going to have full oversight of where those referrals are going and what's happening as an organisation, but we need to go through the design process with communities around those family referral hubs. From 1 July, nothing's going to change in terms of the caller experience, in terms of that phone being picked up, but what will happen for them in the background is a decision - an earlier decision - about whether or not a matter is going through to a - that family referral hub or through to - collecting more information to assess whether or not there needs to be a child safety response.

Ms WEBB - Right. So there's a few questions I have around that. Thanks for the information. We've moved away from the gateway model into the ARL model to stop kids falling through the cracks and stop separate approaches or siloed approaches of some sort. That's why we moved to that ARL model.

So I guess that thing that's immediately - for those who may have familiarity with the history of it all where we can immediately be thinking, are we taking ourselves back to a situation where we risk having kids fall through cracks and not be dealt with in that sort of wraparound, comprehensive, fully assessed way. So if early decisions are being made, who are they being made by and how are we going to know that they were the right decisions?

Because if it's just a very quick point-in-time decision around an area of complexity for that child or that family, I think there's some reassurance that needs to be given there about how cognisant we are that we're not returning to a model that previously had been identified as having issues and problems. So that's one question I have, and maybe that's a starting point for response. Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister. We have done a huge amount of work in the design and establishment alongside the Australian Centre for Child Protection, and there's a series of evidence briefs that describe how decisions will be made, the through flow of work, the oversight that you talk about that's really important so that children don't fall through the cracks.

And we are confident that we are strengthening a system, but also having practice that is closer to families as opposed to at arm's length over the phone. So an example of that has been the increase in child safety referrals over the last - I would say over the last six months, and that has meant that more children are being seen in person, within their homes, within their communities. And certainly from a safety perspective and protective perspective, that's the kind of practice that we want.

Ms WEBB - So just to pick up on that, you said there's been an increase in the last six months of referrals that have come in through the ARL and have been in a more prompt fashion sent through to child safety, who then go and do the face to face. What do you attribute that to, the uptick?

Mr WHITCOMBE - We attribute that to some clearer decision-making guidance. We attribute that to wanting to move away from that notion of work happening through a phone sort of system where actually you're only hearing what you're hearing over a phone, and our staff being more confident to make decisions. If there is risk and it is unknown, then going and seeing what's happening and helping a family build a safety plan at an earlier stage is a stronger and more safe response.

Ms WEBB - So in some sense, if this last six months that you just talked about is an indication, do you think the new approach with the earlier decision, clear decision about which direction of support to send somebody in, or a family or child in, will result in a more default position of child safety as opposed to family support, just to make sure, and therefore an uptick in child safety responses being needed to do that check in a face-to-face way? Or I guess the problem is, if we default to family support instead of child safety, are we going to be missing important things on a child safety front?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I think you raise a really important point and it's been a part of the design thinking to date. How is it that there's really - for example, if something does go through to the family referral hub and there isn't engagement, or when that in-home work is happening, there's really significant risks to children that are identified - making sure that there's a direct pathway back to the Child Safety Service and actually vice versa.

So the assessment work that's happening for our child safety officers, that has increased in terms of the workload, their ability to refer to the family hub or to other services and the matter not escalate. We don't want to unintentionally surveil more families and have more families in a child protection system, but we have to be more confident as a state and with our practice around keeping children safe in the first instance and being assured about that.

Ms WEBB - Hundred per cent agree.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Yes. So the ARL staff under the new model, are they government employees, are they NGO employees, or do we continue to have a mix in that space?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We do continue to work in partnership with Mission and Baptcare as organisations, and we really value the approach that we have had in terms of it not just being that statutory work and the way that we work. What is changing, though, is that that decision-making point around child safety, the child safety matters that are coming through, it will be a DECIP employee.

Ms WEBB - It's important for accountability purposes, to my mind, so if we're moving to the model where that key decision at that early -

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right.

Ms WEBB - point, that must be a government employee, in my mind, not an NGO employee in terms of accountability.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. That is a change that we're making, and then the role of Mission and Baptcare in this space really plays a significant role in the family referral hubs.

Ms WEBB - The hubs being collocated close to community, I think, is positive. I'm going to be, you know, sceptically optimistic about that, just because, you know, various of us have been there for a long time observing this space, seeing the cycle go round and round. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - I just wanted to add, through you, minister, I think those of us that have been around for a while and seen that probably didn't envisage that the numbers of calls to the ARL would go from -

Ms WEBB - Would get so high.

Ms WEBSTER - from 12,000 to 32,000 over the period of time.

Ms WEBB - I think it was 8000 to 32,000, wasn't it?

Ms WEBSTER - It was.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - So there's a sustainability, and with that number of calls you have to think about the safety of children and families getting the response they need.

Ms WEBB - I agree. I agree. In asking questions about it, I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't be looking to improve or change or reform where it's warranted.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. No.

Ms WEBB - I'm just looking for -

Ms PALMER - I quite like your sceptical optimism. We'll take that.

Ms WEBB - Can I move on to another area, please, Chair?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Minister, I'm just interested: has the government stated its ambition to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care and by a particular percentage or a particular quantum?

Ms PALMER - We don't want any children in out-of-home care, do we?

Ms WEBB - Sure, that's an ultimate goal.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - But at the moment, have we actually a stated intention to make a particular reduction over a particular period of time?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly, yes. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you, minister. This is a really nuanced answer that I'm going to try and give. At a system-wide level, we want there to be a reduction of children in care, but at the heart of it, we want children to be safe, so not not coming into care at the expense of safety. And I need to be really, really clear about that.

At a system-wide level, you would want to ask the questions about, do we have the right services and supports teamed up that get alongside families, that help them build their parenting capacity, keep children safe within those homes, within their communities? Because we know that entering care has adverse outcomes in and of itself. It's a traumatic event in a child's life.

We have to balance that risk of that decision against all of the things that we can and should do for a child in terms of entering care. At a system-wide level, I have been quite clear within my portfolio that I am aspirationally aiming for a 5 per cent decrease in the numbers of children in care. What I don't -

Ms WEBB - Five per cent per year?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, and I think that that's actually reflected in some ways through the budget papers around the budget allocation. We need to make sure - so at an individual decision-making level for a practitioner, the message that I don't want out there is that they can't bring children into care, because it's a -

Ms WEBB - Sure. 'We've got to hit a target, therefore don't bring kids in'.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Absolutely.

Ms WEBB - Yes, I understand.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And so that's why there's a really nuanced answer to this. We want to give children every chance to remain safely within their families. We believe that we can do better with some of the things that we're putting in place over the course of the next year, and we should be holding ourselves to account around those things.

Ms WEBB - Would it be fair to say that setting the target is more to do with activity in all of the areas surrounding child safety officers, and it shouldn't necessarily be impacting the work of your child safety officers and their decisions, but it should be impacting the decisions and the design of services and the investment and all of that for everything that sits around it that either stops kids going in or brings kids out?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you, and through you, minister. I agree with you mostly that it is about, you know, that system design and those things being there in the right way. But I also do believe that there's growth from a practice, skills and capability perspective about how we do work in the space of risk and how we do build safety and how we do, you know, get alongside families in ways that share power and enable families to be more involved in decision-making. There are some great examples that are going on across the state that reflect that kind of practice, and I want that kind of practice to become the norm across the state, so it's an and-and.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Thank you. Another area, to keep moving. The commission of inquiry recommendation that relates to shifting out-of-home care to the NGO sector, I understand we've delayed that in terms of where it used to sit in the recommendation phases. When are we expecting that to be completed in its implementation?

I'm not asking this question from a place of criticising a delay in implementing it, because this is a really significant thing to do, and I certainly would want to be seeing this done in a very careful way and with the right capacity there when it is ready to be done. Please take the question as an invitation to explain to me where we're up to in that process and what the timeline is likely to be realistically.

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

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you, minister. The carriage of this work is through our Uplifting Care reform team. Just firstly, the level of engagement that they have had across caregivers, across children who have experienced care, across experts, are a really significant wide range across our NGO caregiving sector, has really been at the heart of informing our strategic approach to how we transition out-of-home care to be delivered, you know, by community organisations. The timeline to that is likely to be published soon. There is a model of care that has been developed for out-of-home care.

As a parallel document to that, there's also a what we call putting children safe, our child safety approach. And sort of bringing the plan for those things to be implemented is a roadmap that has been developed through the Uplifting Care team, and we intend to publish that. That roadmap takes us through to sort of 2029-30, and we do think that it will be, you know, quite a staggered process. I just want to sort of couch all of this in our current reality.

About half of our care at the moment is externally delivered, but if we were just to look at where the funding was going, the much more significant proportion of our funding for out-of-home care goes to external providers. We have had some internal conversations, and we will continue to talk to the implementation monitor, the children's commissioner's office and others about whether or not we end in a space with a full devolution of care, and that's come about through other jurisdictions' experiences of -

Ms WEBB - You normally need to have a government last resort option, don't you, I think.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And that's what we're exploring.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And so we've had some open conversations within our portfolio and with the implementation monitor, but I just need to be really careful in saying any of those things. No decisions have been made about that. But we want to have a care system that always has a place for a child.

Ms WEBB - Yes. The model of care that you said has been developed and to be implemented, is that going to be implemented, though, before the full shift, so we're implementing that soon in the system as we have it now so that it's in place as the transition to the NGO sector occurs over the coming years?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. There's many, many moving parts of what's required to land the fullness of our model of care, and it's going to rely on us doing some much stronger work from a cross-agency perspective, cross-government perspective, and it's going to rely on some of the decisions that we make within DECIP in terms of better ways that we can team up between our student support services, ourselves, CFLCs, and take that really strong teamed up approach. So aspects will be phased and those things are worked through in the roadmap that we really do hope to share, and I'd love to be able to share that with you in the future.

Ms WEBB - Right. Okay. Great. We'll look forward to it in times to come.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. A couple of ones to go back to some more data-based kind of questions. We talked last year and I'm interested to follow up and just check in again on the use of shelters and crisis accommodation facilities for children in out-of-home care.

So I'm interested in how many children in state care currently are being housed in crisis accommodation. Last year you gave me a figure that was a cumulative figure for the last three years. So maybe an updated figure across three years just so I can get some sense of continuity.

Ms PALMER - Just while we're getting that answer, we actually have another answer to a question you asked earlier.

Ms WEBB - Great.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Thank you. Through you, minister. The answer was to the COI, FTE and funding that was coming over from DPAC.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - So there are five FTE that are coming from DPAC and the funding is - for 2026-27, the total is 3.575 million. That's the same for the following financial year as well, 2027-28. And in 2028-29 that drops to 1,025,000, because many of those things are relating to implementing things that would be completed by then.

Ms WEBB - Things that would be completed by then.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And so while you're just looking at that data that I asked for around use of shelters and crisis accommodation for children who are under state care, the other thing that is the follow-on question after that is about the length of time children in state care are housed in that way. Is there a piece of data that you can give me that indicates something in that space?

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much. Thanks, deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I will update on the information that I've got. In terms of the previous years -

Ms WEBB - If you've just got an annual figure, that's fine.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I've got our latest figure which was five young people accessed youth homelessness crisis accommodation.

Ms WEBB - Are you referring to this financial year we're currently in - the 2025-26 financial year, that figure is five?

Mr WHITCOMBE - The period that I'm referring to is from the 1 July 2025 to 31 March.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Great.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So it's a nine-month period.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So five in that time. And what is the length of time, generally, or is there an average, or is there some indicative data point you can give me about how long they're spending in that sort of accommodation?

Mr WHITCOMBE - So I'm not able to provide that, but I'll check as to whether or not we keep those records, and if we do, absolutely, we'll provide that. And just to clarify your question, do you still require the previous years?

Ms WEBB - I'm quite interested to see, because last year when we spoke about it in Estimates, you gave me a figure that was a three-year figure which wasn't - it wasn't quite as granular as I was looking for then. So if you can break it down and give me three separate annual figures, for example, leading into the five figure you've just given me today.

Ms WEBSTER - So through you, minister. We can see what that is, but it might have been because the numbers were less than five for each of those years, because we don't give a number.

Ms WEBB - For some of those years. Three years, 19. Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Just because it has the capacity to potentially identify children and young people. We can clarify that.

Ms WEBB - If you can give me some sort of -

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - The other area that I'm interested in around out-of-home care as well is the use of salaried care placements. And these are typically pretty expensive ways that we care for kids, and appropriate ways at times to care for kids, but increased cost in the out-of-home care sector, I think, probably in some sense attributable to this area. So I'd like to get a sense of the tracking of their use over a couple of years and what, if any, trajectory we're on with it.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I think the rise in placement certainly reflects a number of contributing factors, certainly around the increase in the complexity of children that are entering care. What we're seeing there, greater demand for those really high-support placements. There's also those ongoing challenges around fostering kinship carers as well.

But salaried care packages are only used when a child's needs cannot be safely or appropriately met through standard care arrangements. And the increased use of this really intensive type of care aligns with a broader national trend towards those more complex care presentations requiring that really intensive and indeed individualised support for vulnerable children. And I'll just see if the deputy secretary has more to add to that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister. So just some of the hard data I think that you were asking for. Between 1 July 2025 through to 30 April - so a 10-month period - the expenditure on salaried care packages, which included respite care, was \$90.4 million. The current average annualised cost of a special care package is 765,000, and that is an increase from the previous year where it was 699,800. Demand for services for children increased during this financial year and a large portion of the service need was met for children in salaried care.

While there is a need for salaried care placements, the work that we are doing is to establish a greater suite of care placement options. There's been some really excellent work through a program called Care 2 Thrive, which in some ways goes to a professional caregiver model with quite intensive wraparound supports. But we know that we need quite a diverse range of options for children and young people.

Ms WEBB - Is there anything you can point to that provides context for the increased demand this year for salaried care places?

Mr WHITCOMBE - So through you, minister. What we consistently see for children in salaried care packages, the biggest thing would be disability and some quite complex needs in the disability space. We often have children who are experiencing mental health and drug and alcohol issues as well, and off the back of significant trauma, often quite complex behaviours.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So those things are certainly driving the increase. It is also fair to say that we have not had the level of foster and kinship carers.

Ms WEBB - I was going to say, has it also been related to losing, potentially, experienced foster carers or a different shift in that mix.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. So at the moment, we have 519 foster and kinship caregiving families in the state. We want that to grow. And part of our strategy is about a recruitment and retention strategy that the Uplifting Care team are going to be doing. So I hope that that provides you with more of the context.

The biggest opportunity from a budget perspective that we have this year is not to be retrospective or reactive in our spending. When a child needs a placement, we are sometimes having to stand up salaried care packages. If we were able to commission and invest in services ahead of time, which this Budget allows us to do, we're in a much, much stronger position.

Ms WEBB - I was going to say, so what are we budgeting for here, then, in terms of salaried care placements? What have we built into this Budget?

Mr WHITCOMBE - So what has been built into this Budget has been modelled on what's been spent this year.

Ms WEBB - Okay.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So the Budget reflects the spend this year - the actual spend - and I think that's right. What we do have going on in the background is the setup of care panels, and it's a mixture of practitioners, a person who has a strong practice background alongside one of our commissioning team members who comes with a strong financial background.

And we are working through the contracts that support those salaried care packages, contract by contract, to make sure that they are reflective of the needs of children and make sure that they are appropriately priced with some clear goals and clear direction for where that child is ultimately heading in terms of their long-term care.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Absolutely.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt has a question.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I believe it's the right area. Bringing Baby Home was a key deliverable in last year's Budget and was funded over the forward Estimates. I'm just wondering how that program's going now and also how are we measuring the outcomes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you very much. I remember you had a particular interest in this last year. So of course, Bringing Baby Home is an intensive support model that provides up to 12 weeks of hands-on parenting education and support to help parents make positive changes and build sustainable parenting skills.

And we're often talking about babies who are at imminent risk of being separated from their families. So this is very much about those first few months of a family's life and a baby's life. So it's about developing family skills, it's about confidence and the ability for them to grow and thrive together.

So the program is either delivered directly within the family home and safety support or within a dedicated Bringing Baby Home residence. And so this service is delivered statewide, and we now actually have the opportunity for families on the north-west to have Bringing Baby Home support in their own home.

So previously, there was certainly the Bringing Baby Home program, but it was where that support went to the home. Now there's an opportunity in the north-west for them to actually come to a residence. So what that means is that because they'll have access to that residential home-based support program, that'll be four more families over a year in the north-west through that really intensive residential support.

So we're really excited that we've been able to expand the program because we know that there are circumstances where it's not appropriate for the support to go to a family home and we need to have the baby and a parent or a carer come. So really, really good to see that. With regard to outcomes and how we're measuring that, I turn to the deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you, and through you, minister. I'll start. There's a few different categories in there in terms of our intensive family engagement service. And the data that I'm going to talk to is actually data from this year.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So of the referrals accepted in our IFES services from 1 July through to 31 March, 66 per cent of families had made significant change and were able to step down from that level of intensive response. It was harder for others. 13 per cent were referred to Child Safety for assessment of new issues or concerns.

And those particular situations may be re-referred to IFES once those immediate issues have been resolved. There was 10 per cent of families that weren't able to make the necessary changes and there was statutory intervention, and there's just a small few remaining families didn't engage in the service or withdrew their consent partway through. I've got further figures for Bringing Baby Home if that's helpful.

Mr HISCUTT - Sure.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So Bringing Baby Home is delivered through three partners, Glenhaven and CatholicCare, who provide the residential component of the service, and Key Assets provide parenting, education and more wraparound support alongside them.

So in terms of the outcomes of the families who completed Bringing Baby Home in this period, 82 per cent met goals, made significant change and, where young ones, their babies didn't enter care. And we've had situations where other children or siblings of that baby have also been able to be returned home because of the great work that families have done.

The remaining 18 per cent exited early and child safety service intervention was needed because there were issues that needed to be resolved. There were five children who were subject to orders at the time of the Bringing Baby Home referral and all of those orders were able to be lapsed prior to Bringing Baby Home ending, which was a great outcome.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Ms Webb, you had a question.

Ms WEBB - Yes, just one other area before we move on to youth justice.

CHAIR - Well, I have a question after you as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And it relates to the ARL changes that we were discussing previously, but how that then intersects with the Arch model, because of course the Arch model that we've had in place relies on that co-location of police and a range of services, sexual assault and counselling services. And what was the child safety and ARL presence as well. So shifting to the new model of an ARL, is that going to impact on the integrity of our Arch model?

Ms PALMER - Yes. And, how wonderful is the Arch model. And great to see we now have an Arch facility in the north-west coming online.

Ms WEBB - But it is a model that is premised on co-location. So is what we're doing with ARL going to disrupt that?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we'll certainly be answering that question. So it is really good to see that we now have the three areas of the state with the ARL - with the Arch model, which is really fantastic. We had a similar question to this yesterday. So I might pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. I absolutely support what the minister says regarding support of the program. I think, though, too, that the deputy secretary indicated yesterday around being able to be flexible about the allocation of resources in terms of the need for those resources.

And that isn't to say that the Arch model don't need the resources. It's our capacity to be able to move and be flexible about the resources, particularly in line of the operational changes we're making to the ARL. So it is a bit of a balance, but absolutely happy for the deputy secretary to outline those changes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. So again I just want to provide assurance that the changes to the ARL won't impact on the service response in terms of Arch. And I don't want there to be a misconception either, that co-location is not factored into our thinking, it's just the amount of co-location. So we're still looking at our staff being there and being available for segments of the week during the week.

We need to understand the demand and actually how much work is coming through for child safety services that's specific to that area and we need to have a proportionate response to that demand. And we do know that if we're to look right across our service, we still have children that don't have allocated key workers and need an allocated key worker. And so we have to balance the resources that we've got as we build and grow our service, which we're actively doing, to make sure we're having our people responding where the need is greatest.

Ms WEBB - Are we expecting that co-location to be there in each of the three Arch centres?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, that's correct.

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Ms WEBB - But potentially a lessening of that, depending on what's demonstrated around demand.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right. What I would like to add to that is there are good relationships at local levels, and we want to make sure that it is as simple as picking up a phone and there being a response in the same way as there would be walking across the floor and having a conversation. And so we're doing work in the background to make sure that there's always someone available when the need is there, if they're not co-located at the site at that point in time.

Ms WEBB - It's not quite the same, though, is it? And is the sexual violence counselling that's part of that funded out of this department as well, or how is that funded?

Ms WEBSTER - No, it's through the - I think it was with DPAC.

Ms WEBB - Police or through DPAC or?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Yes, that's right.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could just ask you, minister, just about specifically the Malana Youth at Risk Centre. Just wondering how many residents it actually holds. You're aware of Malana Youth at Risk Centre in Launceston?

Ms WEBB - It's going to be, probably, like [inaudible] -

CHAIR - No, there's not necessarily youth justice.

Ms WEBB - No, no, I think it's probably housing and homelessness.

CHAIR - I don't know, I just would have thought that it - it doesn't come under you? Child and Youth Wellbeing.

Ms WEBB - It's like Colville Place.

Ms WEBSTER - I think it's like Colville Place, which would be housing and homelessness services.

Mr WHITCOMBE - We can double check and come back to you.

CHAIR - Yes, I just assumed that it's -

Ms WEBB - You may have children, potentially, that sometimes [inaudible] -

CHAIR - I would imagine that you would.

Ms WEBSTER - It's definitely Housing Tas.

CHAIR - Housing Tas.

Ms WEBSTER - Because it's homelessness services within Housing Tasmania.

CHAIR - It is, but it's also - it's homelessness, but it's also children basically coming out of areas like youth justice and other places where they've got - I realise they've got nowhere to go, but I would have thought that it might have come under child and youth, but I - it probably should, really, rather than under Homes Tas. But anyway, discussion for another day. All right.

Ms WEBB - There may be kids in state care who are sometimes placed there, like there is with Colville Place.

CHAIR - There are. There are. No, that's fine.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So through you, minister. One of the previous questions that we hadn't fully responded to relates to this issue around children who access homelessness services, and you had asked about the previous three years, and so I've got that breakdown for you.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Okay.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So I think in our last Estimates hearing we gave a figure of 19 for the previous three years and it was made up of seven children or young people in the 2022-23 period, six in the 2023-24 period and eight in the 2024-25 period. And that, as I said earlier, the number is five for a nine-month period.

Ms WEBB - Five to date, sort of thing. Yes. Thank you. I appreciate that.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Chair, can I just add - sorry, I know we're jumping around.

CHAIR - Yes. No, no.

Ms PALMER - Just back to your questions.

CHAIR - About Malana? Only because it's youth at risk. Yes.

Ms PALMER - Not specifically about that, but what I can say is that in 2024 DECYP and Homes Tasmania signed a service level agreement to improve housing outcomes for young people in out of home care and youth justice.

And the agreement outlines the respective roles of each agency, outlines priority access to accommodation and support for young people in care or for those who are transitioning out from care or detention, and describes escalation pathways to address any unmet needs of our young people.

So actions under the SLA progress priorities for both agencies, including improved communication and practice level information for operational staff, providing additional Homes Tasmania properties for out-of-home care, additional supports for young people subject

to orders in supported accommodation, improved access to existing accommodations supported by pathway planning for young people.

The SLA is governed by an oversight group with representatives from both DECYP and Homes Tasmania, and I'm advised the group meets regularly to actively progress the agreed actions. So the department has a portfolio of over 40 properties that are leased from Homes Tasmania for children and young people in out-of-home care, and this number has continued to increase to meet demand.

Ms WEBB - It was 43 last year, has it increased from that?

Ms PALMER - Beg your pardon?

Ms WEBB - It was 43 last Estimates. Do we know what the figure is now?

Ms PALMER - As in the portfolio of properties?

Ms WEBB - The number of head leases. The number of properties for which we have a head lease from Homes Tas.

Ms PALMER - It's over 40. I'm not sure what the exact number is. I don't know if we can -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I do know there is current work going on around Housing Tas prioritising some homes at the moment for our children and there's a number of homes that are in the pipeline for us. So we can get some more information that's more specific.

Ms WEBB - That'd be great. And there is a youth housing key deliverable in the budget papers.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So I have just had an update though, the current number is 48.

Ms WEBB - Nice work. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Yes.

CHAIR - No, it just seems very strange, minister, that I would have thought it would have come under your portfolio, particularly 12 to 15-year-old youth, rather than Homes Tasmania, and I can speak to you afterwards.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. So just through you, minister. I think if the individual children were known to us, whether it was through child safety or youth justice, then we would have involvement, but that would be at an officer level, not at an oversight. It does sit within Homes Tasmania. All homelessness services sit within Housing Tas.

Ms WEBB - It's going to be weird when they sit within Building Tasmania.

CHAIR - I will have a discussion with you outside this area to give you some feedback perhaps. No. Thank you. If we have no other particular questions in this line item, we will move to 4.2 services for youth justice.

Output Group 4.2

Services for Youth Justice

Ms WEBB - If anyone else wants to start, that's fine, before I get stuck in.

CHAIR - All right.

Mr GAFFNEY - This was yours.

Ms WEBB - You go with yours.

Mr GAFFNEY - Are you sure?

Ms WEBB - Go with yours. Yes, please, do.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. All right.

Ms WEBB - Yes, we might as well.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. And it's one that you won't be surprised that I'm asking because we've had approaches from a number of people and concerns. Whilst it's been raised to me that there are concerns with the model of the new Pontville facility, although there have been people that's looking forward to it as well.

There may be different guidelines, policies and processes, it is still a singular isolated facility which - risk it's becoming not dissimilar to Ashley mark 2 when it finally opens, even though I know that whatever's going to happen in there is going to be markedly different, hopefully.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - But there is a group of people and there is a group of evidence that says that there is - what scope is there to develop group homes for youth offenders in the north and north-west which are much more accessible for the families of offenders and their close support networks, and I dare say much more effective at rehabilitating these young offenders.

One of the things that's very central to rehabilitation of youth offenders is having a closeness to family and friends on an accessible basis. So by transferring the youth from Ashley to Pontville is further disengaging them from the communities where they must go back and get their supports from.

So I know we're going down that track, but I just want to know, is there going to be any thought given to homes in the north-west and north facilities that can help that young person rehabilitate in an area that's familiar to them and their friendship groups are around them and the people they need to be connected with?

It's always going to be a bugbear in Tasmania, but I think it's one that we need to have that conversation right now so we don't have the same scenarios that we've had at Ashley for a number of years now. And I'm not having a crack at Ashley by this. It's just saying that we need to get this model right.

Ms PALMER - Yes, we do. And I think there's lots of elements to your question. So I'll start with the comments that you made at the beginning about, are we just going to have a different building, same youth detention centre, but a different building in a different part of the state.

And I think the work that's been done - and I know that the deputy secretary will speak with great passion and at great lengths about the therapeutic model of care. It will be a youth detention facility like something this state has never known before. And it's not just in the design of the building, it's in what will happen inside those walls, the therapeutic care for these young people.

We want to see less people in a youth detention facility, but if they do end up there, what this new therapeutic care model - elements of which are already being implemented where we are at Ashley - but the model of care is very, very different, trauma-informed, therapeutic.

And it is really about turning lives around because for a young person to end up there, it really is the end of the road and a lot of things must have gone very wrong for them to be there. So that's probably the first comment that I'll make.

There is quite a number of programs and resourcing that we have seen families in the south of the state use in order to visit their children while it's been in Deloraine at AYDC. So a lot of those - that's already set up and in place where we support families to come up from the south to the other end of the state to have that time.

There's also a lot of support around cultural connections as well. So a lot of that is already in place and that will - obviously that will still be in place with the facility being at Pontville. But I might pass to the deputy secretary for further information.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister. As you'll be aware, the facility itself is part of a broader reform program which is aimed at improving youth justice in Tasmania by providing a therapeutic model of care focusing on early intervention, prevention, rehabilitation and, as we've heard consistently, with detention as a last resort.

So while the funding for the Pontville facility doesn't extend to dedicated facilities in the north and north-west, current activities in the youth justice blueprint and our plan and our commissioning services will, and they include diversionary and intervention support statewide, including in the north and north-west for children and young people. I'll give an example and then I will talk about accommodation services.

Mr GAFFNEY - Please.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So, for example, bail support services have been increased and we're currently in the process of tendering for a 24/7 statewide bail service. Further supports are to be developed in youth accommodation as part of the action plan to provide safe and supported accommodation for young people to have their needs met.

So just to be a bit more specific about that, we agree that there are accommodation needs that need to be diversified in the north and north-west, and we want to have every opportunity for a young person not to have to go to Pontville.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. Good.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And to have an alternative option. And so our commissioning and planning team are actively working with a range of providers in the north and north-west to commission alternative accommodation options. I'm going to continue, but just with a wee adjunct comment. It's really important, and we have active conversations in terms of the youth justice reform across mental health services and the residential components of that and drug and alcohol services, and potential for that into the future as well. It's not just a one-agency response.

But total funding for 2026-27 and 2027-28 of \$4.9 million is provided in the Budget for supported bail and supported accommodation programs which are currently being sources. I could talk to the range of more early intervention services that are being funded as well.

Ms WEBB - Can you repeat that figure that you just said?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. \$4.9 million is provided in the Budget for supported bail and supported accommodation programs which we're currently in the process of commissioning.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, minister. I think there will be a lot of people out there comforted by the response from the dep sec, so good.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt, was it a follow-up with regard to Pontville?

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Yes, feeling that over the course of the conversation, perhaps. I'm just wondering whether - I mean, it's on average 15 or 16 people over the last two years that are in youth justice detention. What is the maximum number we've had at any one time over the past few two years?

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek that information for you.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I'm going to go from what I know, and the team then behind me will get the exact figure.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I am of the understanding that a bit before my time it did peak at 26 at a particular point in time, and I am aware within the last year that we've been at 22 young people. And we did sustain a period of time, really from July last year through to March this year, where our numbers remained high, and we didn't actually have month-on-month a significant increase of numbers of children coming into the facility or young people. We did in July; we had a really significant lift in one month, and it took us quite a period of time. Today at AYDC we have 11 children and young people in the facility.

Ms WEBB - Remand versus sentenced?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Three sentenced and eight on remand. So that demonstrates some really significant work over the last few months to see those numbers drop. In terms of that hard data, so our average number of children and young people in AYDC this year through to 31 March was 18.5, and that was up from 15.8 in the previous year. At the moment, we're seeing that number come back quite significantly.

Mr HISCUTT - I guess that was to lead up to what's the comfortable number that can be accommodated in the new Pontville centre?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. The planning permit allows for 24. The design and funding allows for a 16-plus-four model. Sixteen would be the capacity of the new facility, and it's broken down into smaller, more home-like environments of two, three and four-bedroom homes or units.

The four other beds that exist, two of them are for orientation and induction - sorry, excuse me - and two are for sort of health, mental health responses. So there's the ability to think about who is placed with who within those homes that exist on the site. It's really important from a risk perspective and from sort of age and development perspective as well that we place children in the right parts.

Mr HISCUTT - Okay.

Mr WHITCOMBE - It just allows us some breathing space. And often young people do arrive in the facility coming down from alcohol and drugs or pretty heightened with all that has been going on, so we're really excited about that opportunity.

Mr HISCUTT - I guess my concern, then, is the fact that within the last year we've had 22 and we're building a centre for 16. Obviously there's all this other work going on, and we hope - but we also know that with increased cost of living and other elements in our society that that number could increase. Are we setting ourselves up to fail by building with such a low number intended there?

Ms PALMER - No, I don't believe we are setting ourselves up to fail. I think the youth justice facility is just part of a whole system of reforms, and this budget is certainly showing investment in those areas. It goes back to the previous item where we were talking about children and families and the early interventions there.

That can change a directory of a child's life from a young age. This is just part of that whole system, and where we are investing is in the areas that the plan is to keep children out of youth detention. No child should be there. We don't see good outcomes there.

Mr HISCUTT - No. I mean, we are talking about, I think, with 11 people, 0.0001 - sorry, apparently I speak quietly; I need to talk a bit louder. It is 0.001 per cent of Tasmania's youth, off a quick calculation.

It is very low numbers, and although we would not like to see anyone there, obviously there is a need for it. I'm just, off those numbers said, very concerned that if we're at 22 this

year and also through what we've talked about in school and the increase in violence there, so there is young people - yes, yes. I'll leave that as a comment, not a - thank you.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - It's worth responding to that, though.

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry, through you, minister. Can I just make a comparison that might assist? And I totally understand this, and the work that's going on will address many of the things that we're talking about. There's a couple of pieces of policy work that the commission of inquiry recommended around minimum age of criminal responsibility and minimum age of detention.

But to give you a comparison that might help, Ireland has a population of 5.32 million people, and their average daily youth detention is 39. We have 571,000 in Tasmania, so I think 20 should be sufficient, given the work that we're going to do.

They have a maximum capacity in Ireland of 46. So that gives you some indication. And they have done a lot of the work that we're doing. I think that we're more ambitious in what we're doing, and we should be able to achieve that. I totally understand that commentary, but just to give you a comparison, that has worked.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - My view is that we need to remain on that focus.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, and can I just add to that, secretary? We did some modelling of the numbers against the policy and service direction of travel that has been committed to through the blueprint and through the commission of inquiry, and so we modelled it on real children who were in the facility, and we took a couple of cuts of those to say, if we had what is talked about from a policy and legislative perspective, if we had the service system, what would that mean for these particular children in the facility? Would they be there?

We were able to work - and it's not perfect, because we are having to make some assumptions - but we were able to work through that, and it really showed that the average number that we would have in a future world with those policy settings would sit around 10 to 11 children. I am passionate about this area.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, understand, yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - But the size of this facility, we're setting ourselves up to succeed, because we do not want children unintentionally in detention environment, and we should set up a service system to do everything we can to keep them safely within their communities.

Mr HISCUTT - Two more quick questions, then I'll pass on because I know there's others.

Ms WEBB - The tendering you're doing for bail support right now should immediately take some kids who are in Ashley out, right?

CHAIR - Excuse me, Mr Gaffney had a follow-up, I believe.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - I just wanted to follow up on Gaffney's question.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - You mean 'Mr Gaffney'.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - 'Mr Gaffney', sorry. The honourable Mr Gaffney. Without identifying, is there any way of knowing where the current - or, on average, which jurisdictions of Tasmania the cohort is from? Do we have information on that?

Ms PALMER - We do. We're always really careful with giving out that information.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, I understand, and if you can't give that, that's okay.

Ms PALMER - Because under a certain number people can be identified.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Or anecdotally I'm happy with, not the actual number.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. So certainly. Through you, minister. There's a couple of pieces of data that would be indicative. One is the police arrest data and prosecutions data that's publicly available, and that's taken from 2025, and that shows where between the south, north and north-west the majority of the offending is occurring through. Certainly the south has seen a significant rise. In terms of numbers of young people from the south in Deloraine at the moment, it oscillates sort of between 60 and 75 per cent are from the south.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Okay.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So that's the indicative, but it fluctuates.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. That's what I wanted to know. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - The other question is, you know, based off these numbers, there's obviously best intentions, and, you know, I'm as hopeful as anybody that those numbers come out. What would happen in the instance where there were a greater number needing to be detained than could be included at this centre? What would the outcome be? Because obviously we can't change our -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. This is the work of the Youth Justice Act and the principles that underpin the future Act, which is going out for discussion, and how

decisions get made about children and young people entering the facility, what alternative options we have.

Certainly I know the secretary went and visited Overstone in Ireland, and they've got the ability within their regulatory system to make some assessments if there are significant numbers, to make some assessments about young people who are absolutely safe to leave leaving early, for example. Look, there are a range of mechanisms, but we have to go through the process of working through the legislation, the options we have, and what's - you know, we need to hear from the community around that.

Mr HISCUTT - Okay. Yes. All right. Thank you. Thanks.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - It's possibly a naff question, actually. If you've got a 17-year-old in Ashley and they're doing their time, you know, and they're seeing some improvement and they turn 18, do they stay in Ashley until that time? They don't get transferred somewhere else, do they? But once they come out of Ashley, if they then commit as an adult, that might be a different scenario.

Ms PALMER - It's certainly on a case-by-case basis.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms PALMER - There's not a hard, fast rule. I mean, if you had a 17-year-old that was in Ashley and they turn 18 and their time finishes in a number of weeks, it would be incredibly detrimental for there to be any movement there.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms PALMER - So it really is on a case-by-case basis about what is going to result in the best outcome for that young person, and that is, of course, part of the thinking around, and also what is the right thing for the centre as a whole and for the other young people in the centre as well.

Mr GAFFNEY - In the centre.

Ms PALMER - But I don't know if the deputy secretary wants to add more to that, perhaps, around the process.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, sure, through you, minister. The situation that you described, the answer would be no, the young person would stay. You described a young person who was, you know, getting on with their sentence, doing well, and the presumption is, in terms of our memorandum of understanding and the way that we work with the Tasmanian Prison Service is that, you know, if things are going well, the presumption is that they stay.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That does change when they hit their 19th birthday. The presumption at that point is that they would transfer, unless there's other circumstances that

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would mean it would be appropriate for them to stay. But you can imagine with a facility at the moment that ranges sometimes from age 13 year olds through to 19, there is a point at which a transfer is the right thing to do.

The minister was absolutely correct in the case-by-case sort of approach to this. We do everything we can as a service to keep the children and young people there, and the numbers that have transferred to the prison service are very, very low.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. I just have a follow-up with regard to Pontville before we move on. The location of Pontville has been raised by several groups that I've actually met with, and the question really was that do you consider that there's a significant risk of triggering trauma responses in the residents, their families or visitors from the facility being in close proximity to the cannabis facility and the multiple rifle ranges?

Ms PALMER - Yes, it certainly has been quite the topic of discussion. One of the things I did when I first became minister was to go to the site and actually be there to try to understand what that noise -

CHAIR - Yes, because there is quite an aroma when you drive past at times.

Ms PALMER - Yes, there can be. There's certainly been work done that has, I believe, resolved the issue with the smell coming from across the road, and I will get the deputy secretary to speak to that. And also -

CHAIR - The rifle range.

Ms PALMER - When I was there and was listening, if you don't remember - if you don't think to listen, it's actually noise you don't notice. That's my assessment of it.

CHAIR - Young people may be traumatised by it, though, that's all.

Ms PALMER - We've certainly done a huge amount of work in this space. Can I just add a little note of caution that there is a TASCAT appeal around this at the moment.

CHAIR - Okay. Right.

Ms PALMER - I'm just trying to talk about my own personal reflections and just to be -

CHAIR - No, that's fine. And you did mention that it's been resolved, the smell, so I was just wondering.

Ms PALMER - Yes. So the deputy secretary, I think, can talk to that.

CHAIR - I hope that doesn't mean they've got to be locked inside.

Ms PALMER - No.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. No, it doesn't mean that at all. We wouldn't want that. And there has been a new incineration process installed at the botanics facility, and we know that it is making a really significant difference. I'll be interested in a year's time if you're driving through the area -

CHAIR - It's more stopping them making the smell rather than actually keeping the children inside.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right.

Mr HISCUTT - Got some big fans.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Just to the situation around the gun clubs, I too have gone and listened at the time of them operating. In terms of any induction and initial assessment approach when a child or young person comes into the new facility, it is going to be part of the kind of questions and assessments and understanding about their background in terms of any issues around the noise from the gun. For me, you know, it sounded like something that was actually quite background noise.

CHAIR - Right.

Mr WHITCOMBE - But we would have an operational and practice process in place if there was a trauma response there for a young person to make sure -

CHAIR - There'll be someone there.

Mr WHITCOMBE - that they're not exposed to it on the Wednesday afternoons and the weekends that the gun club is operating.

CHAIR - Because I'm not sure how close the gun clubs are. I should disclose that I am patron of a gun club; not one of those two, but of a gun club. But I just wasn't sure how close they actually were. Because I know that when I go out to the other gun club, it's very noisy and you must wear headphones, or not - well, yes, earmuffs.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Yes. Just for the record, I've just been corrected; it's the mulching and shredding process that has changed, not the incineration, so I just wanted to have that on the record. Mulching and shredding.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. I'll pick up on a couple of things that have been mentioned in passing and some other answers, if I might. One is around the raising the age of criminal responsibility in that aspect of the recommendations coming through from the commission of inquiry, which is obviously a process to work towards with that law reform. We did have some conversations yesterday - was it yesterday when we had police when they were in here?

CHAIR - With Tas Police, yes.

Ms WEBB - A couple of questions around that. I'm interested in hearing from you about what work is being done to ensure that the community and stakeholder consultation is being undertaken to feed through into those reforms, particularly because the police described it, they've been doing scenario planning with DECIP around practicalities and situations of how that might look once the change is made in relation to custody or use of force or how police respond to incidences.

CHAIR - Well, they can't. I think their answer was they actually can't do, anyway.

Ms WEBB - Yes. When the law changes, there'll need to be different arrangements for how they respond, so they've been working with you. I thought you might like to speak to that while you're with us today and how, over the course of the next few years as we move towards that recommendation timeline coming into play with the change in the law, that's going to work.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. It will require doing things differently. That's the whole point of it. That will take adjustments from all areas of government to do that. I might hand to the secretary for more.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, thank you. Through you, minister. We have been doing that scenario testing, and Mr Whitcombe has been chairing that panel with senior police, senior members from the Department of Health and Department of Justice as well. I think has DPAC been involved in that, too? Because it is a whole-system reform.

Ms WEBB - Yes, it is.

Ms WEBSTER - A number of the things that we'll need to look at are things like mental health services and -

Ms WEBB - Drug and alcohol.

Ms WEBSTER - - drug and alcohol services and those sorts of things and homelessness services, so all of that picture. We're doing that work. Mr Whitcombe met with the Secretaries Board, with the acting secretary, while I was on leave, and from that we have a series of meetings that we're setting up to meet individually with those departments with myself and the commissioner of police, the head of justice, the head of health, to scenario test what it might look like in this model when the Youth Justice Act changes and when the minimum age changes, presuming parliament do make that change, and when minimum age of detention changes. So it's really working through what we know now about those children and young people and what it will look like then.

I think it is then coming to what's going to happen with this particular scenario, so it will be quite detailed work that we're doing, really, to reassure other stakeholders, but also to get their feedback and say, 'Well, that isn't going to work for us, and so you need to think about a different way of doing it'.

After we've done that work, the plan would be to release the discussion paper around the Youth Justice Act publicly so we can get that public feedback. Because it is a very broad suite of amendments, and some of it will be challenging.

Ms WEBB - Yes. A huge shift for the community.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, absolutely.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - That's the plan at this stage. We're sort of tracking towards that being the second half of the year, doing all of that work. But we'll need to do it around real-life scenarios, if you like, because we just can't take a hypothetical view. We've got lots of data, we've got lots of information. We can de-identify that. But we have to work through what would happen in this situation and who is responsible.

Ms WEBB - Because that's what you'll be challenged with by the community once we are talking about this as a community. The people say, 'Well, what are you going to do when X, Y and Z happens?'

Ms PALMER - 'When this happens', yes, yes.

Ms WEBB - 'What are you going to do when this kid does that?'

Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely.

Ms PALMER - We do understand that.

Ms WEBB - Me too.

Ms PALMER - But that is why we're doing the hard yards now to say this is a completely different way of thinking, a completely different way of acting. And what do we have to put in place now so that this system is set up for success? And totally acknowledge that the system that we have now is not fit for purpose for where we're going, so there is work that needs to be done, and it certainly is being done.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Just to provide some additional comment to that, through you, minister. The scenario testing has been really important. We walked through 16 different scenarios just with police, and there's been other scenarios that we've been working through as well. At the heart of that, the balance between having responses that are therapeutic, that are rights-based, that are going to bring about change, we want to see change. We want to see the offending behaviours stopped. We want to see young people supported. And when the offending behaviours stopped, we're seeing less victims of crime in the community.

The service system needs to be able to respond in ways that are therapeutic and, just as importantly, that keep the community safe, and so the robustness of the discussions is really significant. We've gone through a series where the commitment from the other agencies - you know, health, police, justice, education, and DPAC have become a part of those conversations - have been really down in the detail about how this will work, and there's been huge engagement from those agencies in how we work together as a system to see this be successful.

CHAIR - Thank you. Did you -

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you, I'm happy, but I have had a bit of time. I'm sure you've got lots more questions, yes.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I just wanted to know what the government's current confidence is with the price of the new facility, Pontville detention facility. Or I can bring that up in capital, yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. No worries at all. Thank you, no. Without prejudicing the current legal standings, but if the site was unable to proceed due to either TASCAT or a Supreme Court case, what would the policy direction be? Understanding we're working in hypotheticals, but have you considered that?

Ms PALMER - There's two decision points that need to be made here. We as a team feel very confident that we have done everything we could do address any concerns that have been made, but just I do want to be careful with any comments in that space, because it is a live TASCAT matter.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Then, of course, there's public works committee as well. That's another, you know, decision point. But at every turn we have done everything we can to ensure that we have been incredibly robust in identifying concerns that have been had. It's a pretty amazing team, actually, within this department who have been working in this space, because we understand people's concerns and we understand the complexity of it.

You can see the passion at the table. When you're asking me questions the dep secretary is saying, 'I can answer that', and the secretary's like, 'I can answer that'. I just want to remain really cautious because there are those two decision points that are imminent, and yes, probably just leave my comments there, if that's okay.

Mr HISCUTT - Just wanted to ask the question. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Just a couple of quick ones around other law reform-related things, because it probably just ties in with the previous conversation we were having. Through the reform of the Youth Justice Act, will we be dealing with the current constraints that are there for police around using diversion because kids currently have to admit they did the crime before they can be put in or sent through into the diversion programs? Is that being addressed in this law reform? Probably a nice, quick answer.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Good. The children in adult watchhouses issue, which I think there was quite the excellent op-ed in this week highlighting that again as an issue, which I think we would agree is far from ideal in the current arrangements, will that also be dealt with in this

reform so that children won't be going through adult watchhouses in police stations or in prison environments?

Ms PALMER - With regard to the reform, I'll just get the secretary to speak to that. But, of course, that sits with the Minister for Corrections.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms PALMER - I think the comment I made yesterday is that I had stuck my nose into that space, because they're obviously our children that are going through there. Have visited the remand centre in Launceston, have spent time speaking with those who work on the ground in the remand centre with these young people, trying to understand from their perspective, you know, what happens on a regular basis in the remand centre, and then bring the children who are there, similar to when at times they arrive at Ashley.

There's alcohol impacts, there's drugs, there's trauma, frightened. It's a pretty heightened environment. It was good to see the work that they have tried to do to be more accommodating to young people, looking at separation where they can in the watchhouse, but we shouldn't have children in watchhouses at the end of the day, so I want to see as few young people as possible in these spaces. Don't know if the secretary wants to add more to that.

Ms WEBB - I'm just wondering if the Youth Justice Act can deal with this issue as a reform.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Part of it can. I think we can talk through things like early interventions and what might be possible under the Youth Justice Act. But I think then it comes into the service system response as well, and mentioning things like drug and alcohol and how we can divert young people from being detained at all. I think that is something that is wider than the Youth Justice Act reform piece.

I think the early intervention practical supports for families, those are the sorts of things keeping - all of those preventative things can be addressed through the work we're doing with early intervention, and we can start that now, because we really don't want to wait till we build the new facility; really, we want to try and minimise the number of children entering detention.

Ms WEBB - Sure. I guess what I'm thinking is even when we've raised the age of criminal responsibility, and there's still going to be instances where there's still going to be, say, a 15, 16-year-old who's picked up by police because they've been doing something that's untoward, and at the moment, well, at that stage, yes, that would still be criminal, because we're not raising the age to that age. And rather than be taken to an adult watchhouse, can the Youth Justice Act be reformed to require that they're actually taken somewhere else for that initial reception into police custody?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. It can respond to some aspects. As an example of this - and these are discussions that really need to be had through the discussion paper, through consultation, but the kinds of discussions that we've been having at an officer level have reflected a system where children would not go into watchhouses should there be a, you know, offence that's taken place and there's active harm that's occurring. We would have another service system response.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - The Youth Justice Blueprint has action plans associated with it, and the action plan that we've committed to, the cross-agency youth justice action plan that we've committed to, has a component in there that commits us to exploring alternative options to watchhouses, reception prisons, for a future service delivery model. It is a complex issue, and I echo the secretary's thoughts about the wider service system having a role in this, in the resolution of this issue.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - I also have a follow up. Sorry.

Ms PALMER - If I could just add to that, Chair.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms PALMER - DECYP and the Department of Justice are really working together on this issue. And I know that the Minister for Corrections, this is very much in his line of sight, and we are quite regularly workshopping, looking for options.

We've even gone and looked at other government-owned buildings. Would that be more appropriate? Really trying to think outside of the box to see, was there any opportunity for change quickly. So it's something that certainly minister Barnett feels really passionately about, as do I. And we continue to work on this issue together.

CHAIR - Just a follow up in the same area. And as you probably know, I've been working for over 30 years volunteering with Tas Police with young offenders from as young as 10. And sometimes I do go to the watch house.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - But obviously, when it's going to move to Pontville - so at the moment when they come in - and I have to be quite blunt and honest here - many of the offenders I've seen have committed some pretty awful crimes.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - So it is about community safety as well. We can't have rose-coloured glasses on. But when it moves to Pontville, at the moment, so if a young offender comes in, they don't have a parent, they don't have a guardian, someone like myself is called in and we sit there. If they do have to go to Ashley, yes, they might be on remand.

You know, it's pretty obvious they usually admit the crime that they've done even though they haven't been to court. But at the moment someone can quite readily and easily take them down to Deloraine. I have asked, what is actually going to happen when they have to go to Pontville, which is a much longer distance. I appreciate, I guess, it's a similar thing coming from Hobart.

Ms PALMER - It is. Yes.

CHAIR - This is the thing, is there a possibility that even a reception prison or an area could be made available at Ashley? Because we're looking at Ashley, aren't we, changing it perhaps to a prison farm? I'm just sort of wondering something like that. Because you're going to have to have police there. If you've had an offender, regardless of whether 15, 16, the age changes, you still are going to actually have to have police or people actually in that area. So has any thought been given to having something like Ashley, where you'd have a reception area there rather than going to a watch house?

Ms PALMER - I think that would probably be a question better put to the Minister for Corrections. What I want to see is that children are not detained in a watch house, regardless of where it might be. But as I say, the minister -

CHAIR - It does depend on the crime they've undertaken too, minister.

Ms PALMER - But the Minister for Corrections is certainly being very proactive in trying to find a solution in this case.

CHAIR - No. Thank you. Did you have a follow up?

Mr HISCUTT - Just a follow up a little bit.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - As you said, currently from Launceston it's close, but from Hobart south. I guess the issue here as well is the fact that from north-west, south is a lot longer away than Deloraine.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - At least Deloraine is a middle of the state-ish, sort of, for a lot of people. Whereas now there are some people -

CHAIR - They'll stay overnight in the watch house.

Mr HISCUTT - Now there are people that are coming from a much further distance away.

Ms PALMER - It's a Commission of Inquiry recommendation that our government has accepted. And so we work from that position. And at the end of the day we want to see investment in the areas that will stop this before it actually gets to this point.

Mr HISCUTT - I understand.

Ms PALMER - And that is where our focus absolutely is.

CHAIR - Stop the offending. Yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Chair, on indulgence, we do have a question in the child safety space that we took on notice that we now have an answer for.

CHAIR - No, that'd be good. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So through you, minister. This question related to the regional breakdown of numbers of children who weren't allocated. So as of today, 296 children are not allocated. That represents huge progress in our portfolio to ensure that children do have a key worker wherever possible.

Ms WEBB - It does.

Mr WHITCOMBE - The breakdown for the north is 81 children and young people are not allocated, 39 in the north-west and 177 in the south.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. So, Ms Webb, if you want to continue questioning for the moment.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Correct.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Touches in a little bit to what we've just been talking about, I guess, because it relates to transporting children. And I'm just going to follow up on the security contractor transport of young people in custody safeguarding review that was done 2025 by the Office of the Custodial Inspector. So I've got some questions relating to that, just to give you the chance to flick to the right bit in your notes.

So on 2 December, the Custodial Inspector, Dr Grant Davies, released this report - and it was tabled - and it revealed significant inconsistencies with DECYP's safeguarding of young people in DECYP's care when they're being transported from Hobart and Launceston reception prisons to AYDC, as well as from AYDC to medical appointments, court or other offsite activities.

Specific concern raised by the custodial inspector was use of a private security company contracted by DECYP, that although DECYP had some safeguards to protect children and young people during transport, they did not have systems in place to oversee their use and effectiveness.

So my question's around that, just to follow up and see where we're at, what work is being done to implement the 11 recommendations made in the safeguarding review of 2025 and a time frame for their completion. Do we report on those recommendations somewhere in a public fashion that people could track and see where we're up to?

Ms PALMER - Bear with us, because there's a lot to this question and there's a huge amount of work that has been done and a number of different touch points that have made a real difference in this space. So with regard to the response to the custodial inspector's comments, I will pass to the secretary and the deputy secretary to speak to that. But I can say that work, actually, intensive work began in this space actually prior to that report coming out.

And there's been a number of improvements to transport arrangements, including implementing training and guidelines on the risks in transport, commencing procurement and customisation of a new vehicle. De-escalation training has been provided to transport contractors and one transport vehicle is now actually stored in Hobart which supports to reduce waiting times.

So with regard to the use of contractors - actually met with the contractors, those who have that contract, and it was a real eye-opener to actually spend time with them and hear from them with regard to their perspective. They genuinely were wanting to see improvements in this space, and we certainly responded as a department as we also wanted to see improvements in this space. But it was really interesting to hear from them about what their experiences were in that space.

So I will get the department to go to the specifics of that review, but I will also say that we know one of the game changers here will be to have a youth worker being able to travel with a young person. We know that's a far more trauma-informed practice and there are some very impressive numbers that the department will be able to share with you around what we are doing with regard to recruiting youth workers in this space and the difference that we know that that is absolutely going to have when it comes to that transport experience for young people, whether going to Ashley for the first time, whether it's going to court, as you say, going to medical appointments, all of which I think would be fair to say can be scary for a young person regardless of who that young person might be, they all still get scared at one time or another. So I might go to the secretary, thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. So I'll just start off with some high level things, through you, minister. I think in terms of that report there are a number of things in there that the department accept we should be doing a lot differently and certainly tightened up to that point and providing systems and policies and training to the contractors and that transport for court, medical, reception, prison transfers, release and bail movements.

So we accept that we have a really important role to play, and I think we've really tightened up and improved things since that report, and we welcome the report of the custodial inspector and acknowledge that we had shortcomings at that time. I think now we ensure our transport workers, obviously, hold their RWBP, the national police checks and they've completed DECYP safeguarding training. We've strengthened our governance and contractor oversight. We regularly meet with the contractor to oversee performance and compliance.

And I think all of that should not fall to Ashley. We are now managing the contract at portfolio level under Mr Whitcombe's direction, and then Ashley, of course, had the operational management of the day-to-day and know our young people at Ashley best and work with the contractors. I think that's been a real improvement.

We've done things like develop use of force factsheet as an interim resource for workers while we finalise our use of force procedure. We want to make sure that that aligns with the COI recommendation that we're implementing; developing infection prevention and control guidelines.

We've updated training on de-escalation and managing spitting risks for staff and contractors, using body-worn cameras and dual channel radios during transports is being explored as an additional safeguarding measure.

I want to be clear that spit hoods, including improvised coverings, are prohibited at Ashley and during all transports, and the legislative work that we talked about around the Youth Justice Act will propose formally prohibiting spit hoods in legislation, and clarifying use of force provisions during transport and offsite settings.

We've undertaken induction training for transport workers, covering Ashley operations, trauma-informed practice and youth justice context that's currently being developed, with training expected to be available in mid-2026.

Improved pre-transport information and post-journey processes implemented under the new contract with the provider that was entered into in January this year. And these processes include enhanced information sharing between Ashley and the contractor to allow workers to receive accurate risk and needs information prior to transport.

A post-journey template record is being developed to capture key details of the journey during the transportation of a young person, including incident staff observations on the person's arrival at Ashley and a young person's own description of their journey. The minister mentioned vehicle upgrades and planned improvements.

The other thing I want to mention is that we are working towards and, as much as possible, a youth worker accompanying that transport as much as we possibly can, and the additional staff that we've got onsite have allowed us to do that on a much more regular basis.

Ms WEBB - If I could then pick up on that, you're working towards that. Is it that it sometimes happens now or that you're still yet to implement it at all, or where is that?

Ms WEBSTER - No. I'll let Mr Whitcombe.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We know that there's been at least 20 documented incidents since January this year of youth workers being involved in the transport directly. We have initiated an approach where there's an assumption that they will, but that depends on numbers of staff onsite. Over the last five months, we've seen really consistent growth in the numbers of young people on shift each day at Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

It's gone from an average of 11 youth workers on shift through to an average in April of around 17 on shift. Our numbers have gone - if we were to look back in time, in 2024 we had 94.8 FTE. That jumped by 14 to 108.4 FTE. It jumped to 114 FTE as of March this year. In September last year we had 244 applications for youth worker roles, and in February this year we had 347 applications. And at the moment, at Ashley, we have 12 youth workers completing their induction training.

We do have a contract with Essential Security. It goes through to September next year. And we expect that the frequency of youth workers' involvement in those trips will increase. It was awesome, in many ways, to hear to the feedback from the young people, their voices that said, 'We actually really a youth worker to be a part of the trips.' It goes to the relationships that they have with staff at the centre. It says something about those relationships and the trust that they have, so we want to see that grow over time.

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We are committed in the new facility model in terms of what we're designing at the moment, that we would have an in-house approach to travel when it's needed.

Ms WEBB - I appreciate all the detail there, and it sounds really positive. A really good response to what was a pretty shocking report when it came out. Just two things to follow up from that. One is, is there a public way you report against these recommendations so that people can see and track that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I can respond. We do have a process of reporting back to the custodial inspector, the ombudsman around the progress that we're making.

Ms WEBB - Do you pop that up online somewhere or something so that it's publicly accountable?

Ms PALMER - We don't at the moment. No.

Ms WEBB - Is it something you'd consider potentially? For example, when this sort of report comes out that relates into the space, whether it's the custodial inspector or another oversight body that's going to have recommendations in it, the government generally does a response and accepts or notes or whatever it does. Closing the loop there is that we get in the public domain, also, an updated or an ongoing reporting against the recommendations. Is that something that the department can consider?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. We certainly do that, but it's at a very granular operational level. I think a lot of the things that we're talking about are now linked to the commission of inquiry, the recommendation. There's a lot of reporting that we publicly do. We could certainly look at what else we provide. I do have to say, there are a lot of recommendations -

Ms WEBB - I'm not talking about providing more, necessarily. Yes. This is an oversight body that's come out with a significant report and some serious recommendations. I would have thought it's in the interests of the department and of government to be able to say, here - and publicly, in the public domain, 'Here's the way we've responded.' I'm just thinking about how we just completely close the loop on accountability here.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Through you, minister. There is that COI reporting that is occurring and that is public, and there are a range of recommendations that do relate to that. But the point -

Ms WEBB - Sure. But if I'm a person in the public and have to go and cross-check 191 COIs -

Ms PALMER - Just a sec. We will answer.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. What we have to get right is the balance of all of the things that we are required to deliver on. We're a service that is heavily regulated. We have a range of monitoring bodies and requirements. A lot of our work, when we think about the work that's going on in the portfolio, does relate to making sure they have really good information, make sure that we are very transparent and we have them onsite, often, at the facility.

We have to get the balance right in what we're able to do. I know that there are actually many hundreds of recommendations about Ashley Youth Detention Centre. And just operationally, we have to have ways of bringing them together, getting on with the really important things that we are getting on with, and having simple ways of reporting back.

Ms WEBB - I accept that. And it could happen on the other side, right? The custodial inspector could have a regime where they come back in 18 months' time and get information from you and then report it from their side. However, you've just said we've had hundreds of recommendations relating to youth justice over the years; the COI has wrapped them all up now for us.

But if, over the years, we had an accountability process where government had to make clear in the public domain how they'd responded or not responded, an accountability over each of those decades of years prior would have been there in a way that we simply didn't have, and contributed to the fact that we found ourselves where we were when the commission of inquiry got established. I see this as a fundamental way that we don't find ourselves in a situation we're in, in 2020 when we got put into the commission of inquiry process, is my point.

I'm just asking you to consider it. Would you consider it?

Ms PALMER - I accept what you're saying, and I think it is something that we can consider, but I do back in the comments of the deputy secretary around finding that balance. But I do also agree that in some cases we're reporting to an independent body that can make the decision, as well, about the information that's given to them. But it is something we can consider.

Ms WEBB - And just quickly, then, final on that custodial inspector report. Since it's come out, have there been any complaints or incidents raised in relation to the area that it's covered? Have we got any incidents or complaints or use of force events or safeguarding concerns in that space of contracted transport?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We do monitor the number of incidents, and I can confirm the number is less than five and there's been no use of force incidents with a transport provider between the period of 1 July and 20 May.

Ms WEBB - There have been five incidents. Did you say five? No. Less than five.

Mr WHITCOMBE - No. I said there's less than five.

Ms WEBB - Okay. And none of them were use of force.

Ms WEBSTER - And no use of force.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And no use of force.

Ms WEBB - And that would have included, say, spit hood-type things or that kind of situation. Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - There's been no further incidents of spit hoods.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That's good to clarify. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could ask a question. We were talking about staff and FTEs. Through you minister, with regard to AYDC staffing, what's the total annual salary - let's just go from two annual salaries. Just two is fine, the last two annual salaries. The cost of AYDC workers who are actually on stand down, because my understanding is they're stood down on full pay. What is the cost of these workers for the last two years that are actually on stand down?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. It's not an exact figure, but -

CHAIR - Approximate would be fine.

Mr WHITCOMBE - It was \$2 million.

CHAIR - For a year?

Mr WHITCOMBE - In the last financial year.

CHAIR - Each year.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I don't want to say yes or no to that.

CHAIR - No. That's fine.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I know that they get the -

CHAIR - The last financial year was \$2 million.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

CHAIR - On staff that have actually been stood down. What's the average stand down for workers over a reporting year? Is it 12 months, is it two years, four years?

Ms PALMER - We'll just see if we've got that information at the table.

CHAIR - Just a follow-on question, and I appreciate just giving one question at a time, but while you're looking for that. Why does it take so long to complete, especially when some staff have been stood down for years? Why does it take so long to determine an outcome, particularly when we're paying \$2 million a year for people who aren't actually working but have been stood down and - why does it just take so long?

Ms PALMER - Pretty complex matters for some of them. And, of course, some of them are historical ones as well, but I will ask the secretary to -

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Thank you. Through you, minister. We'll endeavour to get that average time. We'll just need to look at that.

CHAIR - No. That's fine. Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - As to why the investigations take a long time, I think it really does depend on the nature of the conduct. Obviously, the ones that we're talking about are allegations of a serious nature.

CHAIR - Sexual abuse?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. In some cases.

CHAIR - Have they been referred to Tasmania Police?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. All matters of any conduct relating to child sexual abuse or any physical abuse at all are referred to all of our oversight bodies. Tasmania Police, RWBP, the independent regulator, all of our state service code of conduct matters are referred - are shared with the integrity commission upon the allegations being formed; me forming a view around the allegations. And, of course, we would also - if it's a current young person, we would also mandatorily report to the ARL.

Everything is being reported. In some cases - and I'm not going to talk about any particular matter -

CHAIR - It's just that I only know of one case that Tasmania Police have actually spoken to someone that's been stood down, and one person that's actually had these charges and never spoken to a police officer over a number of years. I'm just concerned for the extent -

Ms PALMER - We can address that.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Some matters would be referred to Tasmania Police. Tasmania Police do their own independent investigation and, of course, I can't speak for those investigations. They may not meet a criminal threshold, and I'm unaware of the police investigations, nor should I be.

CHAIR - No. That's fine.

Ms WEBSTER - In some cases, we wait for an outcome of the Tasmania Police investigation, because it might be a serious criminal matter, and our investigation may hamper a criminal investigation. Depending on the matter, there is obviously contact between our investigation team in Department of Premier and Cabinet have taken on all the AYDC historical child sexual abuse allegations. It is very much a case-by-case basis.

CHAIR - I guess this is something from natural justice. They're automatically believed, or are the alleged incidents, are they investigate as well that they are actual factual, or is it part of the commission of inquiry that a child is always believed?

Ms WEBSTER - No. It is a part of the police investigation, obviously, is around the criminal code, the Evidence Act, all of the things.

CHAIR - Just looking at both sides, that's all.

Ms WEBSTER - And from our perspective, from a code of conduct perspective, which I can talk to, it's where natural justice provisions are absolutely applied. The threshold is different in code of conduct matters, so there's a reasonable belief that there's an allegation, and it's a level of probability. But there is still a very significant investigation that is undertaken by an independent investigator, so all of those matters - now, there might be additional matters that come up throughout that investigation.

It might in talking to a witness the witness makes reference to someone else, and that line of investigation is followed. In all cases, once that investigation is being undertaken, the person for whom the allegations are made against is given an opportunity to respond to that investigation, whether it's an in-person interview, it could be on Teams, it could be over the phone, or they can decline to take part in an interview. And the investigator still undertakes their investigation and refers that back to the shared capability investigations unit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

They then write to the person and provide them with a copy of the investigation report and provide them sufficient time to review that report and provide a response. In my experience, and I've been undertaking and been the decision-maker in codes of conduct for a significant period of time, often people want a little bit of extra time to read that and get advice and support.

Sometimes it's through their legal practitioner, sometimes it's through their union, sometimes it's through a support person. If there's additional information that they provide, maybe the investigator has to go and then talk to someone else. It is an extremely thorough and complex investigation.

CHAIR - And the cost of an investigation?

Ms WEBSTER - It would depend on the individual investigation.

CHAIR - Of an average investigation cost?

Ms WEBSTER - I'm not sure that I have that detail.

CHAIR - I'm just thinking, \$2 million in salaries and I'm just wondering what the investigations would cost, as well, which is obviously a considerable amount of money in the youth justice area. It just seems a lot of money that could be used in other areas.

Ms PALMER - Just wondering if the cost around that would sit with the state service.

CHAIR - The state service.

Ms PALMER - The head of the state service.

CHAIR - No. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Can I just respond?

CHAIR - Yes.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBSTER - I understand the cost is significant. But you mention natural justice, so we wouldn't want to cut a corner on that. But also, this is about child safety, so I have to be absolutely certain in making a determination of whether someone can return to -

CHAIR - It impacts both sides.

Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely. There's no doubt about that. For that reason, it does take time, and it needs to be a thorough and independent investigation.

CHAIR - All right. Thank you, minister, and -

Ms PALMER - And I could just possibly add to that. One of the things that we are trying to do is improve the transparency of interactions between staff and our young people for safety and for security reasons, and to ensure that the capture of accurate and objective records. And to that end, we currently have 74 body-worn cameras that are onsite now.

We also have extensive CCTV. Obviously, it's not operational in the areas where it shouldn't be operational: a young person's room and shower and what have you. But they're some of the measures that we're putting in place to ensure that where there are interactions between staff and young people, we have that and it's able to be reviewed and it is reviewed.

CHAIR - I really appreciate it. That time being 4.15 p.m., we will take a break for 15 minutes and resume at 4.30 p.m.. If we could stop the broadcast, please.

The committee suspended at 4.15 p.m. to 4.32 p.m.

CHAIR - And welcome back, minister. And we're still on - so this is the youth justice at the moment. Now, if I could just - do you have a question? No. If I could just ask a question with regard to repairs at AYDC. And you may recall that I did ask a question in March this year about the repair costs of AYDC following the incident in October 2025, and I think I was told it was \$1.1 million for the - was it the fire in October this year? Have these repairs already taken place?

Ms PALMER - Are you talking about repairs in regard to certain incidents?

CHAIR - The incident in October.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Sure.

CHAIR - That you actually responded to me in 2025, told me it was 1.1 million.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Through you, minister. Just to the specific high-cost incident where there was a fire involved. Those repairs have been completed.

CHAIR - All right. They came in at 1.1?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I would need to get the detail of the cost.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The October 2025 fire and damage remediation, the total cost of \$2.1 million. And that's correct?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. That was \$2.1 million.

CHAIR - Okay. No, it was just that I think I had an answer of 1.1. Question on the floor?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. And to put that in context, the insurance -

CHAIR - I was going to ask that, whether the insurance paid a proportion of that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. That's correct.

CHAIR - Very much, or -

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'm just going to confirm with my team behind, because I don't want to misinterpret what I'm reading here.

CHAIR - No. That's fine.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. What I thought was correct - thank you - which is the cost to the department was the excess which is \$72,000.

CHAIR - Right. That's the overall cost.

Mr WHITCOMBE - The overall cost was 2,106,941.

CHAIR - In the last financial year - just to keep from now where we are - how many reported incidents were there when wilful damage occurred?

Ms PALMER - We'll just see if we've got that information at the table.

CHAIR - And how many of those were reported to police and what was the cost of them? Because my understanding is that when something's filed with police, there's always a cost associated or attributed.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We would need to come back with that data around incidents that involved damage. Certainly, there has been incidents that involved damage. Whether or not there's a cost associated with that or a charge associated with that is another matter. It wouldn't always be the case. But we'll endeavour to find out what we can.

CHAIR - But even if you could provide how many there were and how many of those were reported to police and what was the cost of them.

Ms PALMER - We certainly have some of that information.

CHAIR - Yes?

PUBLIC

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. We do.

CHAIR - I'm happy to put it no notice. I know you don't like it on notice.

Ms PALMER - No. We have some of that information here.

CHAIR - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - What we've got is some of the serious incident information, and these would require referral to police, obviously, and in most of these cases, involvement of police coming to the centre to assist with the resolution. I mentioned the October 2025 fire damage remediation which was the total cost, 2.1, and our excess was 72,000.

In March 2026 there was also fire damage remediation, and the current estimate costs of repairs to be funded through department operating budget is \$40,000. And in May 2026, an incident damage that requires structural and electrical repairs. And that will be met by insurance with costs to the department budget meeting in excess of \$72,000.

They're the main ones. I can say that not all matters that are referred to police to help resolve an incident involve, necessarily, wilful damage to the centre. Could be an incident that the youth justice workers need support from police.

CHAIR - Such as when the residents escaped and -

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. I was thinking more - through you, minister - if there's residents that have been, for example, on the roof in the past, where we have needed to get police to help us with that if it's not being able to be resolved in a period of time. But that wouldn't necessarily result in wilful damage or cost, but obviously it would result in a referral to police to help resolve the matter, if that makes sense.

CHAIR - It does. Do you actually forecast a budget for maintenance and repairs? So you have something in the budget that's set there expecting - well, obviously, expecting that there will be some wilful damage during the year. I just wondered how much is set aside, just out of interest.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question, Chair. I am going to ask Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support, Kane Salter, if he will come to the table. Thank you. You were almost there, anyway.

Mr SALTER - We do hold whole-of-agency level some funds for potential excesses that occur from year to year. I'd have to check on the exact figure. I think it's two to 300,000, in that order.

CHAIR - The insurance policy, is that borne by the department, I'm just wondering, or is it an all-of-government covering, or does it come out of your budget, the cost for the insurance? Because, obviously, the more claims they have to pay, the higher the cost of the insurance. It's a bit like anything, isn't it? Is that through your department, the insurance? Through your minister from your department, or is it an all-of-government that encompasses a variety? I just wasn't sure how it works.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll pass to Mr Salter for that. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr SALTER - Through you, minister. The bulk of the government insurance arrangements are self-funded. We pay the 72,000 excess in through Treasury and their actuary when they look at premiums for all agencies against different categories of insurance, workers comp, building. But ultimately over time -

CHAIR - We self-fund our insurance?

Mr SALTER - Ultimately, over time it's a self-insurance fund.

CHAIR - Right. Our \$2 million or our 2.1 million is really being paid by us in one way or another.

Mr SALTER - Over time as a self-insurance fund. Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. I bet some others have questions, and I might - Ms Webb?

Ms WEBB - Yes. Absolutely. Maybe staying with AYDC for the moment, I'm interested to talk a bit about user force. It may well be that you provided data on the parliamentary record yesterday in your hearing. I haven't had a chance to review that hearing. I don't really want to ask you to re-give data you gave yesterday that I can go and look up on the record.

Are you able to tell me what data you provided on the record yesterday? That might be the simplest way, and then if I want to ask for some additional, I can ask for additional.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We provided numbers of restraints per month -

Ms WEBB - For this year?

Mr WHITCOMBE - For this year. It was January, February, March, April and, I think, through to May. But it was certainly the first few months of the year. And that data has been a result of the stabilisation workforce work where we got a dashboard that gives us some key indicators about the health and safety and some of the things that are happening at the site from an oversight perspective for us.

Ms WEBB - Have you provided data on number of complaints about use of force, say, in this last financial year?

Ms PALMER - We've got some data here.

Mr WHITCOMBE - We can provide that. I don't think that was covered yesterday.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that now, then,

Ms WEBSTER - This is from 1 July to 31 March. There were 24 - these are from young people, complaints from young people. Twenty-four complaints from young people at AYDC

in that period. 14 complaints were made to the Ombudsman, 12 complaints were made to me, the secretary.

Twelve complaints were made with support from the Commissioner for Children's advocate for young people. And the complaints involved use of force, use of isolation, staff conduct, physical health concerns and other allegations around delays in communication complaints, or complaints that features multiple complaint mechanisms. A variety of those.

Ms WEBB - Are you able to provide the numbers against each of those categories? Because initially I was just asking around the use of force related complaints, but you've given me the full set there by the sound of it, so I wouldn't mind if they're broken out.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. I think we should be able to do that.

Ms WEBB - Whilst someone has a look at that for you, if I could move on. And in relation to the incident review committee meetings that happen on a weekly basis, are you able to give me from the time that we last spoke when I asked for the actual dates of instant review meetings to be provided, and we established that there had been some gaps in the period I asked for then, could we go from the period from our last Estimate's time, which I guess is December. Maybe from December through to present, the dates that those instant review committee meetings have occurred?

Ms WEBSTER - We may have that. It was December. It was the commission of inquiry joint select committee when you asked that.

Ms WEBB - That was, was it? Wasn't the Estimates. They happened in close proximity to each other.

Ms WEBSTER - They were very close.

Ms WEBB - My apologies. Thank you. I'm sure someone will work away on that. You have them?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Through you, minister. I can confirm that we've had 46 meetings this year of the IRC.

Ms WEBB - July last year to date.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right. We could go through and provide the dates, but all of those meetings are minuted formally.

Ms WEBB - Yes. You'll recall when we had this conversation in the committee hearing last year, and you insisted to me that they happen on a weekly basis and all are minuted. And then when I asked you for the dates it transpired that there were four missing, for example, where committee meetings weren't held on that particular Wednesday. I would like to know absolutely that meetings occurred, and the dates that they occurred.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And I think that we can, in the course of this work, go back and get that for you today.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - I appreciate that. And the data you mentioned earlier about the use of restraint, is that right? The -

Ms WEBSTER - Use of force.

Ms WEBB - Use of force. I think the terminology, though, was around restraint that the deputy secretary spoke about.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. That's a just a title from the - we just call it use of force restraint, and isolation is the category.

Ms WEBB - I see.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Sorry.

Ms WEBB - Okay. That's fine. Let me just to my notes. I think there was one further to do with isolation. In terms of use of isolation, are you able to break that data out for me so I can get a picture of this year and comparative to the year before around use of isolation practices?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - I'm interested to know, too, sometimes children are put into their rooms as a response to behavioural issues, so you're isolating for their own safety or safety of others. And sometimes they're put into their rooms because there's staffing challenges. Are you able to distinguish between data on those two kinds of isolation situations?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I think -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. Through you, minister. I do have average periods of isolation per month data just this calendar year. And I will need to clarify in terms of the category. I understand that there is an LYJ plus case management system. And there are times where, as you've asked, where staffing numbers have impacted, and as a result, there has been some periods of isolation for children and young people at the facility.

What we know is that this is reducing. We went through a particularly hard time towards the back end of last year, and consistently since the start of this year when isolation was at a high level, we've seen month on month reductions and isolation and we've seen increased staff numbers month on month as well.

Ms WEBB - That sounds positive and a good story to tell, so I'd quite like to see the data on that if it can be provided, if you're able to break out that data for me.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. The average time in isolation had a peak in January of 4.5 hours, on average. It reduced to 3.7 in February, it reduced to 2.4 in March and it reduced 1.5 in April. And we do also track average staffing numbers on shift. And in January we had an average of 11.68, so 11.7 staff on shift. February that rose to 13.25. In March that rose to 15.6, and in April that rose to 17.4. And we internally -

Ms WEBB - There's a pretty direct correlation there, isn't there?

Mr WHITCOMBE - There is a correlation. And we see 15 as a good number in terms of the safe operation of the facility.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That's why I would quite like to see, because I think it tells a good story for you, to see data about the use of isolation broken out into the two categories: staffing related or behaviour related, or behaviour-management related, across that - for the year that we're in, I guess, the 2025-26 year, if that would be possible, please. And this year is staff improvement, and it, obviously, is very directly related to staff availability and being on site. Thank you.

The other question I had around times when children in the facility are in isolation in some sense and was raised with me and I wanted to ask for an explanation around it, is apparently there's no clocks in their rooms and there's no clocks in common areas. Children are put in isolation situations either in their rooms or in a common area, but isolated. They're not going to have any way of knowing how much time is passing or how long they've been in that isolation situation.

Is that a deliberate policy choice? And is it seen as, potentially, more distressing to be isolated but without being able to tell how long you've been in the situation? We all know how long five minutes can feel, for a teenager, especially, I would have thought.

Ms PALMER - And, certainly, while they're in isolation, there is constant monitoring during that period. They're supported and there's check-ins by staff as well. I think that's important, that it's not that they're in a space where there's no interaction or they're not having conversations and they're not able to engage with those who are there to support them. I'll just see if the deputy secretary can add more.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I'm not aware of any particular policy around clocks, but there is strict operational safeguards around isolation only, obviously, being used as a last resort. But regular monitoring happens every 15 minutes, at least, which is what the minister was speaking to. And continued access to care, education and wellbeing supports and sometimes activities in their rooms occur.

It's not isolation as you might think about it, on your own for long, long periods of time. They are regularly checked in with. There are some activities that they have during that time.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair. I believe we've got some answers to some questions. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Thank you. Through you, minister, Mr Salter's just going to first correct something or update something.

Mr SALTER - I mentioned a figure of 200 to 300,000 for the budget held for excesses. It's actually 720,000, so for 10 building excesses. That's for the whole agency.

CHAIR - That's the budget for this last financial year? Yes. Thank you.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBSTER - And just to update Ms Webb about the complaints from young people, that information isn't readily available in terms of the complaints. We had to go back through each and every one of the complaints, so it's not able to be provided.

Ms WEBB - Are you aware of - in a ballpark, even, way, what proportion of the number you gave me would be, for example, use of force?

Ms WEBSTER - I would say around about 50 per cent would probably be in relation to some -

Ms WEBB - Yes. As an indicator.

Ms WEBSTER - Some indicator.

Ms WEBB - I'll take that as an indicator.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. And I think if we looked at the report of the conduct notices that we provide to the independent regulator, that that would be right. And some of them would be about in terms of that, but that's very much an anecdotal thing. The other thing I just wanted to update you on was the number of, and dates of, the meetings of the committee, the independent review committee. So there were actually, I think, Mr Whitcombe mentioned 48 meetings between -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Forty-six.

Ms WEBB - Forty-six, Mr Whitcombe said.

Ms WEBSTER - It's now been updated, I believe, Mr Whitcombe - 48 from 1 July to 31 May. Fifteen were cancelled and that was because there was - quorum was unavailable, there were operational or business needs, or there were public holidays. So I do have all the dates here in this document.

Ms PALMER - Chair, we're happy to table this.

CHAIR - Yes. That would be fine. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry, it's till 3 June. That's why the figure's different. So it's a more updated figure.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - And I think when we spoke last year in the committee hearing about it, you'd indicated that after those missed dates across the October period post the fire incident, then there was some catching up being done with a couple of meetings a week. So when circumstances like a lack of a quorum or a public holiday impact on holding the meeting, is it intended that there would always be a catch-up meeting of some sort?

Ms WEBSTER - Well, mine, I think - through you, minister - that number is 61 meets.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - So it indicates that if there's 15 been missed and there's 48, they're held weekly, then there have been catch-up meetings.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Correct. Thank you. Do we have data or do we provide data in any of our reporting about number of isolation hours per child as a proportion of their time in detention?

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

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We do monitor periods of isolation per child, but we don't have a figure that says per child per their period of time at AYDC. So we have daily reporting that comes through. It provides an indication of what isolation may be occurring and it gives it to quite a granular level of detail right down to a young person view, so that at a leadership level on a daily basis we're aware of what that looks like for the day.

Ms WEBB - Would you then have in your records available if it was needed for reference, data for each child in their file about the amount of time spent in isolation during their period of detention?

Mr WHITCOMBE - If I could continue to respond to that, it's not - as I said, we don't carry data that's specific to numbers of hours against the period of time.

Ms WEBB - Okay.

Mr WHITCOMBE - But what would be in their file is essentially information about their daily routine and daily care plan. And we do have some situations where some young people are presenting with more complex and risky behaviours and we manage them in a different way. I think the term on the ground is often called 'specialling', where we have a unique schedule around a particular young person and a plan.

So those things are absolutely documented and would provide an indication of what that would look like at an individual young person level. But we really strive in this kind of care environment to be working to build trust and working to build safety for everybody so that whomever that young person is in that situation, that we're relaxing the amount of time that's out, because we want, ultimately, for all young people to be out for the full amount of time during the day.

Ms WEBB - Sure. Thank you. I'll keep going. Moving away from AYDC to go back to a couple of areas back upstream from detention. Still in youth justice though. We spoke earlier in a few other questions about bail support programs, and I just wanted to go back to bail support programs and ask a couple more questions around that area if I could. You mentioned earlier, and I'm aware that you're currently tendering for new 24/7, I think, bail support service system programs.

So what I'm interested to understand is what we've currently been funding and delivering in that space and what the arrangements that are currently being tendered for, what that will

look like when it's in place as compared to now. And I guess that means the services themselves, but also the level of investment.

Ms PALMER - Yes. We're certainly, as a government, committed to developing a youth justice system that achieves better outcomes for children and young people and, of course, looks at that balance of keeping the community safe.

This includes implementing a range of early intervention, prevention and diversion programs and options and supporting children and young people who are on bail. So the 2025-26 budget invested \$2.3 million to support innovative local initiatives and partnerships that target the root causes of youth offending in local communities and engage children and young people in education, training, employment, sport and the arts.

So the Youth After-hours Diversion Service pilot began operating on 7 May 2025 from the Glenorchy police station, delivering an after-hours engagement and referral service through the community sector to children and young people who interact with police. It's the YADS for short, so I don't keep saying the long title - was released in June 2025 and sets out requirements for funded diversionary services in Tasmania which are aligned to the youth justice model of care, contemporary evidence and best practice.

And of course, this aligns with the Commission of Inquiry recommendation that the government develop a youth justice diversionary services framework and begin delivering programs under that framework, and the timeline for that was 2025.

There's also been investment for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. In 2025-26 there was an investment of \$4.4 million in Aboriginal organisations, including 1.6 million invested in Aboriginal organisations to keep Aboriginal children safe in the care of their families. There was 2.8 million for a range of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver culturally safe place-based services in the areas of prevention and early intervention across both the child safety and youth justice systems.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's strategy and action plan, Nukara, was released by the TAC on 9 July 2025, and this strategy provides an Aboriginal-led framework to implement the child placement principle.

And we certainly remain committed to addressing the over representation of Aboriginal children and young people in our youth justice system and in our child safety systems as well through a continued commitment to deliver the Commission of Inquiry recommendations to see those improvements for improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and for young people. And I'll just see if the deputy secretary would like to add to that.

Ms WEBB - Can I clarify the question a little bit as well, because I'm just wanting to make a distinction. In my mind, and I might be doing this incorrectly, but I'm making somewhat of a distinction between our investment in diversionary services and then our investment in bail support programs. And maybe that's a false division to make in my mind, but I think a lot of what you mentioned then are probably in the diversionary area.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - And the question I was - which I am interested to ask about, it's on my list as well, so I appreciate that - but the question I had put was around bail support programs and the difference between what we fund now, what's funded currently and delivered currently, and the tender that's out at the moment for bail support programs, what that will look like and how much we'll be spending on that once it's in place.

Ms PALMER - Okay. The dollar figures I might need to refer to the department on, but we certainly are designing an assisted bail and transition from detention system including exploring accommodation options. So the aim of the assisted bail and transition from detention system is to reduce the number of children and young people on remand and support them in the community in a way that increases community safety by addressing the root causes of the offending behaviour.

So additional funding has been provided to 54 Reasons Reboot program, Mission Australia through the Targeted Youth Support Service and Anglicare through the Supported Youth Program. I'm just reading it slowly because I can see you trying to write that down.

Ms WEBB - That's okay.

Ms PALMER - To increase resourcing to support children and/or young people on bail.

Ms WEBB - Do you mind if I get some clarification on that before you move on to the next list.

Ms PALMER - Sure.

Ms WEBB - So, you said additional funding. So this is within our current - what we currently fund in this space. And will it continue through as part of the service system, once these tenders that are out at the moment are then put in place and funded and operational. Do they stay part of it? Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So through you, minister. And, please, if you need to clarify the question with me, if I'm not responding in the right way, please do. So there has been total funding in the 26 and 27 financial year, so the one ahead and the following, 2027-28, of \$4.9 million.

Ms WEBB - In each.

Mr WHITCOMBE - It's provided, in the Budget, for supported bail and supported accommodation programs.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And you were right to distinguish between diversionary approaches and supported bail. As you'll be aware, there's also the \$3.7 million over three years for JCP and \$2.3 million to support place-based youth offending. And there's a financial commitment to reviewing police cautions and conferencing that's happening as well. In addition, we did receive a - - -

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - Sorry, can I pick up on you there. And which category are those ones in, the 3.7 for JCP and the 2.3 for place-based - diversionary?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, so they are on the diversionary approaches.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms PALMER - So that's the 4.4. That's the bail specific to the -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. So the supported bail and supported accommodation is that \$4.9 million and we are currently in an RFT process to commission those services at the moment.

Ms WEBB - And do we have something that we currently fund that we would put in that category.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I could get that information. I do know that there are currently supported bail services that exist. They are just not statewide. And I could come back to the table with that information. I did also just want to say we did get a further six additional FTE for our community youth justice teams in the 2024-25 budget and that's provided an increase to the capacity of that team to be able to provide more through-care responses for young people. So there has been - 54 Reasons have been providing bail support and transition from detention and there's been a review of that which is informing the RFT approach for the future service.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Okay. So that's informed the investment that's going to be coming through with what's being tendered currently.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes.

Ms WEBB - And has that then pointed you to changes to make beyond what's currently offered through our bail support services? So, for example, 54 Reasons wasn't, say, 24/7, I don't think, for example. It didn't provide that sort of full service or accommodation necessarily. Are we moving to a model that's going to be 24/7?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct.

Ms WEBB - Including accommodation and statewide, more wraparound in that sense?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct.

Ms PALMER - So the request for tender is currently under development to procure a service for 24/7 youth bail support service delivery from 1 July 2026.

Ms WEBB - Yes. It's pretty extensive what's being asked for, is my understanding, in that tender, which is good. So one of the things that I was wondering about is - because we've spoken already on a number of questions around excellent work being done with Aboriginal-controlled organisations - is bail support for Aboriginal children going to be dealt with in the same system or a separate system under separate arrangements with Aboriginal-controlled organisations?

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - So our government is actually working with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver a specific bail support service for Aboriginal people and - sorry - for Aboriginal children and young people.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. And will that be funded out of the same bucket of money then, or is there a separate allocation for that going forward?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - So through you, minister. The funding for that has come from a range of sources in terms of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector. I have reviewed the plan. I don't have all of the figures in my head in terms of where that comes from. I reviewed it just last week.

It's a really exciting plan that involves seven Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to really grow their capacity and response for the young people they're connected to and in the diversionary youth justice space. So we expect to be able to execute those in the new financial year.

Ms PALMER - Separate to the RFT, I think, was the question, Peter. It is, isn't it?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, so I understand that to be separate.

Ms WEBB - So it's not going to be in this -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Absolutely separate to the RFT.

Ms WEBB - Not related to this tender. Okay.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, it's not out of that bucket of money, it's additional funding.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you. And so in terms of the accommodation aspect of bail support programs that we're currently tendering for, what accommodation models is it anticipated that would look like?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister.

Ms WEBB - Or is it, because it's out for tender, we don't want to talk about that because people will be putting forward proposals? Or what's your expectation?

Mr WHITCOMBE - No. So it's been a really - I would say that our commissioning and partnership team have wanted to really emulate a relational approach to commissioning and we have a lot more communication than we have previously occurring across the sector. And so the approach to the youth accommodation needs has been one of coming together with a variety of providers who have been interested in what they could do together.

And a plan has formed out of that that's been - we've been a voice in the room and so have the providers who are on the ground seeing the need. And so the accommodation options will be a mixture of things, from sort of staffed models through to supported accommodation

approaches, and have a degree of dispersed nature across the north and north-west, in particular, of the state.

Ms WEBB - So I'm just trying to picture whether somebody who successfully tenders for these services is going to be utilising existing accommodation options that are there for young people, or whether they're going to be needing to develop new accommodation options for young people, which may involve having to repurpose or build something or provide some sort of facility.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. So my understanding for the RFT is that it is a 24/7 bail support model.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - The accommodation options that I'm referring to come off the back of the government's commitment. There was a \$10 million commitment in an ongoing way for youth accommodation. Part of that funds Kingston House, but it also comes off the back of the portfolio being in a position where it can commission care services in a front-facing way as opposed to retrospectively putting things in place.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - And so that's how we're able to undertake this work.

Ms WEBB - Okay. And then, the tenders open now, when does that process and then the contracting process conclude and when do services begin under that envelope of funding?

Ms WEBSTER - I think I've got that. Yes. Through you, minister. 1 September, we're expecting to begin service.

Ms WEBB - To begin service. And so what I'm imagining, from my understanding of the sort of factors that are going to need to be around that service for it to be successful in the way we'd like it to be, there will also need to be the right health and wellbeing services around, so alcohol and drug services and disability support services and those sorts of things. And we're also going to need the right tie-ins to education system.

Now, that's within your department, minister, so you'll be able to have a close eye on that aspect of it. But how is it built into this model that we set it up for success if it's beginning this year and we don't necessarily have the right supports in service systems that have to sit alongside it, but aren't under the control of you as minister of this department, like our health system or others?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I agree with your comments about the holistic nature of what's required. And the portfolio is undertaking work whereby we've had what's been known as the Directors' Care Team.

And it's a way of escalating issues when services aren't available and it's been well utilised and it's working well. But what we've wanted to do is establish, in local communities, cross-agency panels essentially that are made up of the players that you're talking about: health, education, police and the NGO sector. And we really see the north and the south teams - and

they've got staff obviously in different towns and cities across the north and here in Hobart in the south - as that kind of centre point for bringing together those multi-agency groups.

And we know right now that there are good relationships at local levels in terms of access to those services. We also know that there are sometimes gaps in services and that's where that mechanism around the Directors' Care Team is particularly important. We were able to talk in cross-agency ways to make sure those things are in place for young people.

Ms WEBB - It's concerning to think that - it's going to be hard to deliver the outcomes without that. One last question on this thing. It's really quick. They'll probably be able to say yes or no.

CHAIR - Yes, because then we do have a couple of other line items.

Ms WEBB - Great. It's just a yes or no. The tender that's out, are you anticipating it has to be one organisation that delivers statewide, or can it be a consortium or an arrangement?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you. It can be a consortium.

Ms WEBB - Great. Thank you.

CHAIR - If we're finished - no other questions?

Ms WEBB - Yes, yes.

CHAIR - No. All good. Yes. If we now move to Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Minister, do you need to bring anyone else to the table, or are you fine as you are? Mr Edmunds.

Output Group 5.1

Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, Chair. Minister, following the Commission of Inquiry, oversight responsibilities across the child safety system have increased significantly. What additional investment has been provided to ensure the Commissioner can adequately perform these expanded functions?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Thank you very much for the question. Of course, the CCYP is a statutory authority, but I think we can go some way to addressing your question.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. So through you, minister.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm trying to frame it in a way that you can.

Ms WEBB - You're talking about the one that's been in place, not the new one.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm talking about what's happening additionally after those findings.

Ms WEBSTER - After the COI?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - So through you, minister, I think the new Commission for Children and Young People, which the legislation's now obviously gone through Parliament - currently the process is underway to recruit the new commissioner.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - As also, it's probably remiss of me not to mention the opportunity that we now have to recruit an Aboriginal children's commissioner, which is really exciting. So that is through the deputy premier and attorney, and that's currently being run through the Department of Justice. From the Commissioner for Children and the budget, the expectation is that all - and what's going to happen is that the funding that's currently allocated through this output will then transfer to the new commission.

I understand that the Department of Justice are currently working through what that overall budget might look like for the new commission because it will include some expanded functions, but it will also take functions that are already there, including the Commission for Children and the independent regulator, which obviously do have budget allocations already.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. And how do you navigate that through in the budget situation that we have at the moment, where you've sort of got the balance of increased responsibility and tasks, I suppose, and the budget essentially being cut across the board?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. So through you, minister. I think this is one of the benefits of the commission going to its own agency, in that it's a very difficult situation.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - As secretary of the department, which has been oversighted by the commissioner, we've taken a really liberal approach in the funding, and we've been really careful not to cut any funding or ask for any efficiencies, if you like, to this commissioner.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - And I think we would continue that because of the transition. That isn't to say we wouldn't hope for some financial restraint in these times, but certainly we've - we'd be handing that budget over to the commission.

Mr SALTER - Just to clarify that slightly, for the new operational efficiency dividend, because at this stage we had notionally allocated it across all the outputs, there is an amount, a small amount, that comes off the Commissioner for Children's output.

Ms WEBSTER - Which doesn't include FTE.

Mr SALTER - A dollar -

Ms WEBSTER - Dollar figure.

Mr SALTER - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - It's a dollar figure. Yes.

Mr SALTER - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I believe we have one final question that we took on notice, or providing additional information.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister. This goes back to the questions around salaried care packages that you were asking, and the growth in salaried care packages over time. So back in 2021-22 - so five years, approximately - we had 60 children at that time in salaried care packages and that made up around 6 per cent of placements. And that has grown to 135, which is approximately 12 per cent of placements across our number of children in care.

Ms WEBB - Yes. No wonder the cost has gone up.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. If we have no further questions in the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, we will go to capital investment, and I believe, Mr Hiscutt.

Capital Investment Program

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I was just going to ask, relating to the new Pontville - I closed my book, that was a silly move. Could you advise: A, how much has been spent already, both external and internal, on that process? And then what level of confidence you have in that number?

Ms PALMER - Both of them would like to speak, but I will go to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - So thank you. Through you, minister. You asked for the cost, currently.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, yes. How much is currently being spent, both departmentally - - -

Ms WEBSTER - So how much is currently and how much has been spent. At the end of February 2026, the project has expended 7.901 million, and that includes site-selection assessments; land design consultants to design the facility, including the development of the master plan; schematic design to support the application of the planning permit; detailed design of the new facility, which is underway; statutory fees such as planning application fees; site management fees, so gates, locks and fences; consultants to design early works; landscaping; access road; water supply and upgrades to the road leading to the site; early works landscaping construction; and stakeholder and community engagement activities.

Mr HISCUTT - No worries. Yes. Thank you.

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Ms WEBSTER - And I think from the work that we've done around the planning and the detail that we've done, we're confident of the budget envelope. And as I said, the detail work that's gone into planning has been quite considerable.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Do we have any other questions, members, on this area? No. If we have no other questions on this area, we will move - if you have your people here - Disability Services - or are you waiting for anyone to arrive?

Ms PALMER - No, we can move into that. If you could just give us a moment to pack up and change our teams over. Thank you.

CHAIR - Yes. We will just take some time to change over the table, and we will stop the broadcast, please.

Ms PALMER - Thank you.

The Committee suspended from 5.19 p.m. to 5.26 p.m.

DIVISION 10

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Output Group 1.7

Disability Services

Output Group 1.8

National Disability Insurance Scheme

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, and obviously we're now on Minister for Disability Services. We'll start 1.7 and 1.8 - if we ask questions across the two, because it's a little difficult knowing which go into which area.

Ms PALMER - That's fine.

CHAIR - And if you could introduce the people at the table and then perhaps make a short overview.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Thank you very much for the opportunity. Immediately to my left we have Melissa Gray, who is the deputy secretary, Policy and Reform, and to her left, Ingrid Ganley, director, Disability and Reform.

Thank you for the opportunity to make some opening comments. 2026-27 marks an important phase in the continued reform of Tasmania's disability services system, with a strong focus on embedding recent changes and improving outcomes for people with disability, their families and carers.

Over the past year we have moved from establishing key elements of the Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act to implementing these reforms in practice. The Office of the Disability Commissioner and the Office of the Senior Practitioner are now fully

operational and playing a central role in strengthening safeguards and oversight across the sector.

Work is also well progressed on Tasmania's first four-year Disability Inclusion Plan, a key deliverable under the Act. This work has been informed by extensive consultation including written submissions, surveys, community forums and targeted engagement, supported by a lived experience reference group. I'm certainly looking forward to the release of the plan in the first quarter of 2026-27.

At a national level, significant reform is underway following the NDIS review, including the development of foundational supports to complement the scheme. A key focus of this work is the Thriving Kids initiative, which is being shaped through ongoing consultation with families, providers, advocates and the broader community. Feedback to date highlights both the challenges families face navigating current systems and the opportunity to provide more practical, accessible supports.

Thriving Kids will begin to roll out in stages starting on 1 October 2026, with full implementation expected by January 2028. The Tasmanian Government will continue working closely with the Australian Government and other jurisdictions to support the long-term sustainability of the NDIS, while ensuring Tasmanians can access the supports they need when and where they need them.

In the year ahead, we will continue to progress key priorities across the portfolio, and this includes commencing the independent review of the Act and strengthening approaches to regulating restrictive practices. We will also continue to invest in accessible infrastructure, including play spaces and changing places facilities across the state.

Further work will enhance oversight and reporting through improved digital systems, including new tools to support better data collection, streamline reporting processes and strengthen the monitoring of restrictive practices, supporting greater transparency and accountability across the sector.

Through this work, we will continue to advocate for Tasmania's needs, recognising the unique challenges of delivering services across regional and remote communities, including workforce availability in thin markets, and ensuring these factors are reflected in national reforms and funding approaches.

In summary, Chair, 2026-27 will be an important year to continue strengthening the system with a clear focus on better supporting Tasmanians with disabilities, their families and carers in everyday lives. And I have a fantastic team here and certainly looking forward to having the opportunity to answer questions from the committee.

CHAIR - Thank you. And we'll start with Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, minister. I wouldn't say this of some of your colleagues, but that was a pretty comprehensive overview and covered off a couple of things I was going to ask about. So I'll leap ahead a little bit.

Ms PALMER - That's okay.

Mr EDMUNDS - Particularly around Thriving Kids, I was interested in asking about - and you've provided an update, like an overall snapshot of where that's at - but I'm interested in the work to date to design and consult on Thriving Kids services in Tasmania.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. On 30 January, the Australian Government and state and territory governments agreed that Thriving Kids - a national system of foundational supports for children aged eight and under with developmental delay and/or autism with low-to-moderate support needs and their families - will commence operations, as I said, from 1 October, but it will be rolled out in stages and then needs to be completely rolled out by January.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, on those dates. Yes.

Ms PALMER - So it is actually a matter for every state and territory about how Thriving Kids is actually designed, because we know how to best deliver this for our people in our state. So every state and territory, you're probably going to see a different design for what Thriving Kids is, which I think is really important.

So in February of this year, our government entered into a bilateral agreement with the Australian Government to support the delivery of Thriving Kids and our agencies are working together to design and implement Thriving Kids in Tasmania.

Now, a really critical part of this process is to consult, and I would say we are consulting at the highest level that you possibly could, because we know how important it is to get this right. We are so aware of the anxiety amongst families right across Tasmania with the changes that are happening to the NDIS.

As a state, we are completely on board with the federal government about needing the NDIS to be sustainable, but there are some ways in which announcements are being made, and big statements are being made that are really frightening families at the moment. So we have gone to great length - and I will get the deputy secretary to talk to this - in how we are consulting with families, with providers, with carers right across the state to ensure that we really are developing a program that will work for the families.

So it's been amazing to hear back from the feedback from the consultation that we've had so far. Some of the things that we think families would really like, they're saying, 'No, we don't want that. That doesn't work for us. It works for other families'.

And so that sort of information is just absolutely pivotal in the work that we're doing to actually design this. So that consultation is underway. As I say, we've heard from families, support providers, advocates and, of course, the wider Tasmanian disability community. We've held face-to-face consultation sessions in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart, and there's also been online sessions as well.

And so we've heard from parents who've said, 'I'm here on behalf of a lot of families and we really just need to make this work'. Another one, 'Although there are so many ideas in here, I'm a parent who's actually a bit nervous about this'.

And so we're getting that sort of feedback from our families. And what we want to do is to be continuously communicating with this sector as we are designing Thriving Kids, because

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we are really co-designing it with the voices of this sector. I could keep going, but I will hand over to -

Mr EDMUNDS - Just before you hand over.

Ms PALMER - Sure.

Mr EDMUNDS - This might, if I can, just add it to -

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely.

Mr EDMUNDS - Because rather than ask it after you've answered it, because you might get to it anyway. I'm also interested in what we can expect to look different in Tasmania as opposed to other states, based off - you've touched on that as well.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Or is that design work and consultation still to come? It sounds like it's ongoing, but just to slide that in there before you answer. Yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it is ongoing, but we've got a pretty clear direction about what this will look like and what is needed in this space, which is, of course, that low-to-moderate developmental delay.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Great.

Ms PALMER - And a lot of the shaping of our thinking is coming from our families and what they're talking about. A lot of it's around: 'You need a village in this space. Who are my people? How do I connect?' And so I will pass to the deputy secretary for that.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Thank you.

Ms GRAY - Thanks. And through you, minister. As the minister said, it's a national approach designed for the NDIS to be sustainable, but also designed as a result of the national Thriving Kids Advisory Group led by Professor Frank Oberkleid.

So there's an acknowledgement that Thriving Kids is about looking at the needs of a child and a family, rather than the individualised sort of model of support through the NDIS, for children with low-to-moderate support needs. There's an acknowledgement that prior to the NDIS

there's an acknowledgement that prior to the NDIS, we actually had a pretty robust system of support. As minister said, through previous work, the Tasmanian Government, through in particular, It Takes a Tasmanian Village and the child and youth wellbeing strategy, we've got a really good foundation to design, and additional funding from both the state and the Australian Government to really look at where the gaps are now as a result of the introduction of the NDIS.

So it's making sure that we've got the settings right to support children in the context of their families and their communities and their kin, and for low-to-moderate support needs, to actually develop a system so that they can get support where they already live, learn and play. So it's taking that approach.

I'll just touch on your question about what will look different in Tasmania. Because it's a national model, there are some things that the Australian Government have decided they're doing in terms of a national phone line and web-based supports and parenting programs.

We know that for our jurisdiction we have significant digital inclusion challenges and we have low levels of adult literacy. We are working really closely with other states and territories and the Australian Government to ensure that whatever gets stood up nationally is tailored to our jurisdictional circumstances.

And so a lot of the work that we're doing through the consultation - so recently I've had the absolute honour and privilege to travel around Tasmania and take part in six consultation sessions, both with the community sector and with practitioners and with the private sector, early childhood education and care sector - and hear directly from - we had sector-based sessions but then we also had family and community and sessions with parents that had some children in them as well.

And we're in a unique opportunity as a state, I think, to have some funding available to design a system that's going to ensure that children with low-to-moderate support needs don't fall through the cracks. So we'll be looking at the national bits that are being put in place, we'll tailor them to our circumstances.

We have developed some design principles that really gave me comfort when they were developed with the community service sector and the service sector and with government agencies. The design principles were resonant of what we know after years of working in this space, that, for example, the system should accelerate intake into the NDIS for people who need it. There should be low barriers to entry for the Thriving Kids system.

So the key pillars of the system, just quickly, are: navigation, information and advice; group supports for parents, carers and kin. So these are group supports like Playgroup Tas and other group-based settings through child and family learning centres, after-school programs. The whole idea is that we identify when a child's learning and development - - -

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms GRAY - Yes, earlier. Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms GRAY - So earlier in the process, and we wrap supports around so that hopefully it does - and this is where it's designed for NDIS sustainability, because hopefully that child doesn't then have a trajectory on through to the NDIS.

Mr EDMUNDS - And if it works properly and is designed properly from the start, I assume that they can get rolling quicker at that age rather than all the barriers that come with getting all your assessments done with other disabilities.

Ms GRAY - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. When you talk about what will we see that's different, I think the deputy secretary touched on that low threshold to be involved in Thriving Kids. So it's not based on a diagnosis.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Ms PALMER - And so that's where we see those waiting lists for children trying to get a diagnosis and to get onto a plan. Whereas this is where, for example, a CHaPS nurse may identify, 'Okay. We think there might be a problem here. In they go'.

And so they may still be waiting for a diagnosis but in the meantime they're getting that care and the family is getting that support, those wraparound supports, so that even if they are having to wait a year for a diagnosis, the input into that young child's life is already happening through Thriving Kids.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Great.

Ms PALMER - So we see huge benefits to this program, as you say, if it is developed properly.

Mr EDMUNDS - Great. And just one final one.

Ms WEBB - Is this still on Thriving Kids?

Mr EDMUNDS - Correct. Yes, yes, yes. In terms of the commencement dates of 1 October and then the full rollout by January 2028, are we on track and what obstacles do we need to overcome, if they exist, to meet those deadlines?

Ms PALMER - Yes, that is a good question. I believe we are on track. The most important part of the work we had to do was around the consultation. And the review of the NDIS and this work is actually - this has been in our space for about four years now and we haven't waited to get clarification from the federal government about where we will or won't be going.

For want of a better word, we've been designing in the dark for some time, looking at what organisations do we already have, what areas are already set up across the state, where is that ecosystem and how can we use what we already have in Tasmania.

So there's been a lot of design work that Ingrid in particular, and Mel and her team, have been doing. And to be fair, there have been some surprise announcements from the federal

government, but it's because of that work we've been doing in the background that we feel very confident that we are going to deliver an excellent system and that it will be delivered on time. There are a couple of obstacles which I think are really fair, and one of them would have to be the workforce.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Yes, I'm really interested in that.

Ms PALMER - Thin markets. We already have incredible underspends in the NDIS packages because people can't - they've got the money in their package and they can't actually use it. So that's something we are really looking at. What is that workforce? What's the workforce we've got now? How can we develop it? What's in the private sector that we could use in the Thriving Kids space? So that's very much heightened in our thinking.

And I think the other aspect that the deputy secretary's noted down here is around the fear and the anxiety that people are feeling. And so our job is to keep talking about this and keep saying, 'We are on this, we're working really hard, we're doing all the groundwork that needs to be done'. So I'd say if you want to look at obstacles, they would be the two.

Mr EDMUNDS - Newspaper editors in general, perhaps.

Ms PALMER - Your words.

Mr EDMUNDS - Or the sub-editors, maybe. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - We have a follow up from Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Just a real quick one. I'm just wondering, when you said October 2026 to January 2028, how do you come up with a timeline like that? Is that because of what's required by the - so that's the funding?

Ms PALMER - It's the federal government.

Mr GAFFNEY - The federal government. That's their timeline, and are there certain markers that you have to get to along that road, or - Yes, I'd be interested to know what they are.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Thank you.

Ms GRAY - Yes. And through you, minister. Yes, that timeline is set out in the national agreement for foundational supports.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Yes.

Ms GRAY - And we are working on an implementation plan now that's due to the Commonwealth, that will detail all of that and the milestones that we will need to hit.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms GRAY - Importantly, we wanted to undertake the co-design work with community and with service providers first though, so that we understand what our model is and so then we can understand more - we know what we need to then put in our implementation plan.

Mr GAFFNEY - And you think that timeline is fair and reasonable? I mean, are you going to - obviously everyone's under pressure, but do you think you can achieve those milestones and get to there by the time it has to be signed off?

Ms PALMER - It's the timeline we've been given and we are doing everything we can, and I believe that we will meet that timeline, because that's the job. I'm not sure that it matters whether we think it's fair or not. It's the timeline that the federal government has laid out for us. But we absolutely believe that, as I say, four years' worth of work in the background has set us up to be able to roll this out in accordance with that. Did you want to add anything?

Ms GRAY - Yes. And through you, minister. States and territories negotiated the national agreement on foundational supports alongside the national health, and all states and territories have been pretty - the NDIS reforms are moving at pace. They're moving quickly, and often without consultation with states and territories, and so I guess the issue is states and territories have been really firm that we need the time that we need to get this right.

We want to set this up for success. So there's fear in the community, but there's also fear that the reform will move quickly aligned to the legislation that we've just seen at the national level, and that's exacerbating fear in the community that there may be additional things that will come in over the top of what we're trying to do here with Thriving Kids, and so there's lots of negotiation and lots of - between states and territories and with the Australian government about the timing of those additional changes to the NDIS.

Mr GAFFNEY - Because I appreciate the fact that Tasmania want to look at their own individual, but it does make sense also to have a close connection to the other states just to make sure that you're tracking along similar lines, or they are introducing something, well, that sounds - that could be -

Ms PALMER - Absolutely, yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. So there is good communication between the states and - thank you, thank you.

Ms PALMER - It's actually an incredibly close-knit team of disability ministers across the state from all different political colours. And some of us have been in this space over the journey since the review of the NDIS was announced, so we work really closely. We're learning from each other, we're trying to feed into helping other states there.

We're learning from them as well. It's been quite a privilege, actually, to serve with other disability ministers from every other state and territory throughout this process, and our officials do that as well. There's a great group of officials who've - you know, as I think someone mentioned the other day at some conference or in the national media, we even have our own WhatsApp group, so it is very close; sometimes daily interactions to ensure that we are quite on the same path, yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - No, thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, yes. I've got some questions on Thriving Kids as well. I'm not as familiar with it as I might be, so forgive if they're questions you've answered already or they're not quite on the mark.

Ms PALMER - Yes, that's fine, it's fine.

Ms WEBB - In terms of what's in the Budget for this, what modelling has been done to ensure that the Budget provides sufficient resources to ensure that we have a model that genuinely does focus on that early intervention and it has access to supports in everyday settings and, importantly, doesn't disadvantage population groups such as those living in more remote areas, families without access to adequate social and economic resources, families from CALD backgrounds, Aboriginal families, all those sorts of potential inequities?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - How do we know what's budgeted for actually can deliver the model?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. I'll get the department to speak to the modelling. But with regard to the Budget, so nationally there's \$4 billion available for foundational supports and Thriving Kids, and that's on a 50/50 basis between states and territories and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, \$2 billion funds activities that the Commonwealth are going to undertake on a national basis.

I think the deputy secretary mentioned a national phone line, a national autism information and advice helpline, national workforce development and Medicare-funded three-year-old GP health checks. The Commonwealth is actually providing 1.4 billion to states and territories, so that's the actual 50/50, because they've taken out of their 50/50 share the work that they're going to do nationally.

Tasmanian funding for Thriving Kids is our state's contribution to fund early intervention services for children aged eight and under, and so you'll see in the Budget for 2026-27 and across those four years 8.38 million, which is the state's contribution, and then there is a matching contribution from the Commonwealth, which is 5.9 million over those years as well. The total funding is \$14.28 million for Thriving Kids, and so that's the funding that's available.

Ms WEBB - But I'm mostly interested in - thank you, I understand that's the funding available, but my question is around -

Ms PALMER - Modelling.

Ms WEBB - what modelling has been done to say that we can actually deliver the service as it's intended to be delivered, particularly to groups that might otherwise find it difficult to access.

Ms GRAY - Yes, and through you, minister. We do have a small but mighty team in disability services and reform, and we have data analysts who, because of the reporting to the Commonwealth, to the Australian government, to the NDIS, but we have engaged consultants,

Nous Consultants, because they've worked nationally on Thriving Kids with both Western Australia and the Northern Territory, so we've been able to leverage significant national expertise from those consultants and other jurisdictions.

We have looked at the data, our Tasmanian-based NDIS data, to look at the number of Tasmanian children in the zero to eight age range, and those in Tasmania that have significant and permanent disability, and those that also fall into the low to moderate support needs range. We came up with a cohort number and then we've done a lot of mapping of the existing service system as well.

That, together with the number of children, enabled us to be able to do some work with the consultants on the funding envelope that would be required, and what we have is, as minister outlined, 14.28 per annum to establish Thriving Kids, and sufficient flexibility, because as was stated before, there's a timeline, which is 1 October through to 1 January 2028.

We don't have to set up everything all at once, because importantly - and this was a point of misunderstanding in the community which is breeding some fear and anxiety - children become reassessed - Ingrid can probably talk more eloquently to this than I can - but as their normal reassessment falls due through the NDIS. So we have some time now to phase the setup of Thriving Kids, and we have sufficient flexibility within our funding agreements, both with the Australian and with our Tasmanian Treasury, to roll over funding as required.

Ms WEBB - That was going to be my next question.

Ms GRAY - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Because it's flat funding and it's a ramp up.

Ms GRAY - Yes. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Why is it flat across, but we can roll forward?

Ms GRAY - We have sufficient -

Ms PALMER - We can, we can.

Ms GRAY - Sorry, minister, through you.

Ms PALMER - No, no. We're a team. No, you're right. We had to allocate it somehow, so we've allocated it that way. But if there's an underspend, which you would assume that there probably would be -

Ms WEBB - Yes, a hundred per cent, yes.

Ms PALMER - Yes. So that will just be rolled over, because the cost will build as we're delivering more stages.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. In your modelling you've been doing looking at likely cohorts of kids coming in, we've seen the prevalence of, say, autism, other neurodivergence, sort of ticking up year on year. Are you factoring that in as well, that it's not just going to be necessarily

the kids who are presenting now through the NDIS or otherwise to services in those categories, but there'll probably be a ramp up in those over the years as well?

Ms GANLEY - Through the minister, yes. The modelling looked at the data on the existing client groups with NDIS data, but also other data we had available through our education departments and health departments, and then those projections around what it would look like over a five-year period.

Ms WEBB - Taking into account trends upwards, for example, in numbers of kids. Is there an intention to at some point evaluate or to build in from the start an evaluation plan around the Thriving Kids model so that when we get five years down the track or whenever it might be, we'll be able to have a clear idea about how we've done on it?

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister. The evaluation requirements are set nationally so that there's consistent evaluation across states and territories.

Ms WEBB - Okay, good. That's good to hear. The other thing I was going to ask about was appropriate and adequate workforce capacity. You've mentioned that already, minister. What is the proactive way we're going to actually address that? We all know that challenge is going to be there. We can't just magic up the right workforce from nowhere. Are we building something into our education and training and the like streams here? I know that's not your portfolio responsibility, but what conversations are there across portfolios to talk about the need to put training and a pipeline of workers in place?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister. We have a network of - we have a disability reform steering committee, and so we have each government agency represented on that steering committee, and know that a workforce plans are specific to Tasmania is going to be a critical pillar of this work. Some of the Australian government funding is actually going towards workforce planning, too. But what I would say about the Thriving Kids model is that it's really focused also on innovative ways to address thin markets and service provision in rural, regional and remote communities.

Whilst I said the key pillars of the model are information and advice and supporting group settings, there will also be part of the model which is about providing targeted support to a child in a group setting, for instance. The ways that that can be undertaken, we know that - and we've heard this through the consultation - that families - and we have some success of this in Tasmania, actually, also - like to learn from other families as well, so sort of peer models to looking at - yes, I might ask Ingrid to talk about the wording. It's not always a trained professional. When you're dealing in the low to moderate, it's almost like the difference between a teacher and a teacher's aid, if I use that example.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you, appreciate it. If I could just ask you, minister, a key measure of the Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024, the establishment of the Disability

Inclusion Advisory Council. Can you please give us an update on the progress of the development of the council?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I can, and I'm absolutely thrilled to do that. I wanted to save this announcement for this particular committee, because, of course, the Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act began in the legislative council.

We did a huge amount of the heavy lifting on that particular piece of legislation before it went to the other place and was taken through by the premier. The council is a statutory body that was established under the Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act of 24. The council have a central role in embedding lived experience and expert insight into government policy and service design for people with disability.

Under section 24 of the Act, the council is tasked with advising the minister and the Disability Commissioner on systemic issues affecting people with disability, contributing to the development and evaluation of the Tasmanian Disability Inclusion Plan, promoting inclusive practices across government and community sectors, facilitating engagement with people with disability, their families, carers and representative organisations, monitoring progress on inclusion and safeguarding initiatives.

The council will also submit its annual report of its activities to the Disability Commissioner, who will include this information in their annual report, which is tabled in each house of parliament. Members will be remunerated for their time and contributions in recognition of the value of their lived experience and community insight according to the Tasmanian government board fee policy.

The Disability Commissioner, Catherine Whittington, led the recruitment process with expressions of interests opening in January of this year, and it closed on 24 March. I am advised by the commissioner that there were over 80 expressions of interest during this time, which we were just absolutely delighted with. I certainly want to take this opportunity to credit our inaugural Disability Commissioner and her office for the effort and care that was taken in assessing the applicants to provide a balanced council of experience and background, and to ensure that there is a balance across disability type, geographic location, age, gender diversity including LGBTQIA+, and diversity and representation. I feel like I didn't put them all in.

I'm advised care was also taken in forming the final recommendations to consider where an application may already have significant opportunities to have their voice heard and/or work towards change in the disability community. All recommended applicants participated in group activity sessions designed to assess their suitability for appointment to the inaugural DIAC.

The inaugural DIAC list ensures representation of lived experience across intellectual and physical disability, neurodiversity, parents of children with disability, a wonderful young person of 19 years of age, a GP and an incredible advocate who was previously a member of the minister's disability consultative group.

I'm incredibly honoured to announce the inaugural chair of the council is Shannon Goodwin. Ms Goodwin is an educator in Tasmania for 25 years, and she's currently the principle of West Ulverstone Primary School. I want to share a sentence that stuck out to me when reading Ms Goodwin's application, and the following has been shared with her permission.

These are her words: 'I live with arthrogryposis, a congenital condition that affects my mobility. This lived experience shapes my understanding of accessibility and the important of genuine inclusion. I have lived an overwhelmingly positive life shaped by strong family support and the power of education. The defining factor in my experience has been empowerment, being given ownership over my life, my goals and the way I manage my world'.

When discussing some of the emotional and psychological challenges that people with disability can encounter, Ms Goodwin goes on to say, 'I also believe strongly that many of these challenges are shaped by societal attitudes, low expectations and deficit-based thinking, and this perspective deeply informs my leadership and my advocacy'.

I found her words to be quite powerful, and her expectation that we can and must do better certainly aligns with the goals of what our Act sets out to do and what this council is setting out to achieve as we begin our work together to create a truly inclusive and safe Tasmania for people with disability.

Ms Goodwin will be chairing our committee, and this is the following members who have been chosen for this: Mr Dean - I'm not going to say the 'mister bit' - Dean Foreman, representing Speak Out Advocacy; Michael Small, representing Disability Voices Tasmania. We also have Dr Lucy Mercer-Mapstone, Dr Jane Dhann, Rubie Gallagher, Alex Barry, Adam Quarrell, Clare Waiss, Dana Smith and Monica Cuskelly. I certainly look forward to having more time with the council in coming meetings.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, and thank you for announcing that. That's really good news. I've got a question for you, and I'm not sure whether you can give me any advice on this. Because you talk about Thriving Kids and the innovative ways, and I have mentioned this in the past, and, you know, we talk about what we can do, particularly, you know, can and must do better.

You might recall, minister, when I came back from Western Australia after visiting what was called Healthy Strides - and we're not sure whether the other members here are aware of Healthy Strides, where they have ZeroG therapy.

One of the things they pointed out to me at Healthy Strides, and it was just totally innovative, and I'm just wondering whether we can look at some way of bringing this into our disability sector, that there are children that have learnt to walk that would otherwise be in children for the rest of their life. They actually take the children at the time - one, two, when they actually first would normally be learning to walk - in this ZeroG therapy.

I know it's quite expensive. I think they're a couple of hundred thousand dollars each, and my understanding is that I think Gina Rinehart provided one, and I think the Minerals Council of Western Australia provided a second one, so they actually have two. They're not cheap. But what they actually do for children - and I can talk from personal experience, I have a grandson who had a stroke at birth and couldn't use a select side; his left hand or left leg. He is actually now walking purely because of this ZeroG. And they say that what it actually does is the muscle memory.

And I'm just wondering if something like that - and I'm not sure how we would actually look at it, but when I hear about fighting kids and the fact that people don't - or some people

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would not have to be in a wheelchair, would be able to walk, it's absolutely amazing, and I think it was worth mentioning to your team.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Absolutely.

CHAIR - And I could certainly provide information.

Ms PALMER - Yes. And we certainly would welcome any disability provider that wanted to come into the state and offer services like that. And we certainly have examples of where we do have providers that may not actually be set up here in Tasmania, but they do come to Tasmania. And the Trexo walker is something that they came to Tasmania - I can't remember the name of the provider who bought that - Lucy might know. But that was fantastic.

And we often see families that travel, those that have the ability to do so, travel to get some of these therapies. But always -

CHAIR - But to be able to walk without assistance -

Ms PALMER - Yes. Absolutely. And we would absolutely welcome with open arms any disability provider that wanted to come to Tasmania and set up their operations here so that those opportunities could be had by -

CHAIR - They may even need approaches from Tasmania, I would say, but rather than them approach, I just think it's something in disability services, the money we've put in, if we can have children that actually walk. And the savings to the state from someone that doesn't need to be in a wheelchair for the rest of their lives.

Ms PALMER - Yes. It was the centre of movement that came with the Trexo walker to Tasmania, and I think they've come again since.

CHAIR - They have to use that to help walk, or is it something -

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - ZeroG actually teaches you to walk with no aids.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - And I think that's fantastic.

Ms PALMER - This is where they start with the Trexo walker, and it's really quite phenomenal. I think they're actually based in Queensland, I think, at the Sunshine Coast, is it?

CHAIR - No. That's fine.

Ms PALMER - And I think they're coming back again in January, and so I went and met with them. And some of the therapies that they're doing are really fantastic and certainly really encourage them to look at whether they would consider setting up here in Tasmania for sure. But, of course, that's a business decision for providers.

CHAIR - Maybe we need to talk to the Minerals councillors if they were very supportive in Western Australia. If I just have one further question on the NDIS savings. On the NDIS savings shown in DPAC's estimates, specifically output 1.8, which is - let me just find which book. Output 1.8. The 26-27 estimate for that output in this Budget is \$297.99 million, which is 12 million below last year's estimate of 310 million for the same year. And that was in last year's budget papers.

Yet, the stated NDIS saving for 2026-27 is 3.3 million. Can you just reconcile the numbers for me and confirm whether the full 12 million movement is being counted as a saving or whether there's some other explanation for the difference?

Ms PALMER - Yes. We certainly can.

CHAIR - There likely is. Just to make it clear.

Ms PALMER - Yes. Absolutely.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms GRAY - And through you, minister. Yes. That is correct. Some budget saving measures identified by the department in 26-27 and 27-28 relate to reprofiling the state contributions to the NDIS that reflect, in kind, offsets over that period. By inclined offsets we mean they're disability-related services funded by the NDIS but delivered by state and territory governments. Under the NDIS, individualised funding's provided to participants through their participant plan, as members are aware, so that they can choose who to live as their supports, when and where.

But the exception to this is in-kind support. These supports were agreed as part of the NDIS bilateral agreement for state and Commonwealth block-funded supports where it wasn't considered economical to fund individually. Instead, the Tasmanian Government meets the cost of delivering these supports, and in turn receives an in-kind discount on its agreed NDIS contribution. In Tasmania, the in-kind supports are personal care in schools and -

Ms PALMER - Especially school transport. Regency, that if - with transport you couldn't do that on an individual basis.

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister. What we've done is better or more accurately estimated the amount that we pay to the NDIS, taking into account the offsets of these in-kind supports.

CHAIR - No. That's fine. That's clear. Thank you very much. I just thought I'd just clarify that. Do you have another question?

Ms WEBB - Yes. I do. Thank you. Minister, I just want to go back to Thriving Kids for a minute and just follow up another one that's been brought to my attention. A key concern is that the program may shift too much responsibility onto schools and mainstream services, which some critics say are already, obviously, under-resourced and not sufficiently trained, necessarily, to support neurodivergent children at a level currently funded through the NDIS.

Teachers, unions and educators have warned that this could increase workload and leave children without adequate specialist support. That's what we're hearing from some.

How will schools be better resourced so that Thriving Kids supports are available in this crucial everyday setting of a school and that we're hitting the mark there without putting more pressure on schools? Because I know that the concern that schools might have to absorb additional responsibilities under Thriving Kids without adequate resource to offset that. Can you speak to that, given you're across both those portfolio responsibilities?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I certainly can. And, I guess, it was one of the benefits of being the only education minister sitting around the table with disability ministers. And I was quite strong in my advocacy to Mark Butler - Minister Butler, when he came and addressed us, to be able to say zero to eight, half of them are actually not in school, so this is not something that can be run out through schools. And there's lots of practical reasons for that.

It's taking children out of the classroom where they need to be there learning. We already have educational adjustments and a huge amount of work that happens in that adjustment space already in schools. As part of the modelling that we're doing and as part of the planning that we're doing is looking at, okay, well, what's available to zero to four in our CFLCs, our playgroups, our CHaPS nurses, all of those that are set up.

And then we're looking at our children who are four to eight. Where do we work with them? How does that work so that we're not putting more workload into the education space, into our schools, but how are we actually reaching those children? That's actually part of the consultation process, talking to parents and families who have children that are school age. How does this work for them? And some of the things we've been looking at is, well, what happens after school? What happens during school holidays?

Where are those families? Where are those children that might actually sit outside of the traditional nine to three? That's where a lot of the consultation has gone, that is where a lot of the planning has gone. Because while Thriving Kids is about a cohort of children under 8, there's actually two cohorts within that cohort: children who are at school and children who are not at school. You've almost got two different systems that have to be designed in that Thriving Kids model.

Ms WEBB - But listening to you explain that, that's fine, but I still didn't really hear you explain or confirm that you're confident that we're not going to be putting additional responsibilities that schools have to absorb or tasks that they have to do or things that they have to deliver without additional resourcing under this model. Are you able to confidently say that that's not going to happen?

Ms PALMER - That's certainly not our intention.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you. May I ask another quick one in the disability space that's not Thriving Kids related, but it's just in more broadly for the disability services spectre: advocacy support. I don't know that there's additional funding or an increase in funding in that space, and what do you intend to do to support widely needed disability advocacy in Tasmania, particularly given the fact that the two key organisations currently funded already have waiting lists which will take years to clear.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I can certainly speak to the budget that we have for three providers in the advocacy space that receive funding for these core services. We have the Association for Children with Disability, which is to deliver information and advocacy services for people with disability, their families and carers and related professionals. In the 25-26 Budget that was \$401,270. In 2026-27 it was \$554,508.

We also have Advocacy Tasmania funding, which was \$412,973 in 25-26, and in 26-27, \$425,362. And then we also had Speak Out Association of Tasmania, again delivering advocacy services that enable people with disabilities to increase the control they have over their lives. Funding for 25-26 was \$395,161, and in 26-27 there was \$407,016.

Of course, part of the NDIS contribution and a considerable amount of our contribution through the NDIS, which is expected to be over \$280 million, a portion of that is provided for information linkages and capacity building. It's approximately around \$34 million in funds that are granted to disability organisations, and I know that that's an avenue that a number of our advocacy groups go through for where they get their funding. But they are the three associations that the state government - we fund those organisation.

Ms WEBB - Yes. What I'm interested in is we're not increasing funding, necessarily, to them, given the disruption that's about to occur with the NDIS changes is probably going to increase the situation where they're already not close to meeting demand for their services.

Ms PALMER - Yes. There was additional advocacy project funding, because there's so much work happening in this space at the moment, that we really were relying on some of our advocacy organisation. Advocacy Tasmania received an amount of \$50,000; Speak Out Tasmania, \$80,000; Disability Voices Tasmania, \$50,000; and the Association for Children with Disability, \$50,000. And that was from our reform money that we had in the budget, which is about how do we deliver this huge body of reform. Funding from that area went into those four different organisations.

Ms WEBB - Which is good, but that's just a one-off project level. It's not increasing their capacity in an ongoing way to meet growing need. I'm just concerned - full disclosure, this is an area that I'm familiar with. I used to be on the board of Advocacy Tasmania and chair of the board. And they do find it difficult to get, potentially, funding through the NDIS and through the link grants that are there. It's not a straightforward proposition either.

Ms PALMER - No.

Ms WEBB - They've got limited options to increase their capacity to meet the demand that they're struggling to meet.

Ms PALMER - And it's certainly an area where, as disability ministers for a number of years now, have been advocating really strongly to say that, really, the ILC model doesn't really work.

Ms WEBB - No. It does not work.

Ms PALMER - This model that the federal government have at the moment. But that's been one of the areas that we've been really advocating for. The fact that it doesn't go to core

funding, that a lot of our disability organisations have to fit their model to whatever the description might be of whatever the funding project might be.

We've been advocating really strongly that that just simply doesn't work. And Tasmania is investing a huge amount of money, millions of dollars every year into our NDIS contribution, and part of that is to go to ILC. So we felt we had every right to say, 'Look, listen to the voices of our organisations and they're telling us this does not work.'

We're contributing that money. That's our taxpayer dollars are going into that. There is work that is being done, and I think through foundational supports there is going to be a bit of a retuning of that, but I'll just get the deputy secretary to speak to that.

Ms GRAY - Yes. Through you, minister. The minister's correct. The advocacy around ILC, minister, is extremely firm. I have witnessed firsthand at disability reform ministers council meetings. The Australian Government is also retendering its advocacy funding.

I acknowledge that the pace and the enormity of the reform in this space does put downward pressure on advocacy organisations. But just as an additional piece of information, the Australian Government is retendering its advocacy funding, the National Disability advocacy framework. Hopefully, there are opportunities for Tasmania in that context.

Ms WEBB - I hope that's the case.

Output Group 1.10 Office of the Disability Commissioner

Ms WEBB - I've got one question about the Office of the Disability Commissioner, which is another line there, if that's all right. Probably just got time.

CHAIR - Yes. We've got eight minutes to go.

Ms WEBB - Excellent. Minister, in the budget papers I think there's \$1.86 million in 26-27 financial year for the Office of the Disability Commissioner, and 1.88 million for the 27-28 financial year, and nothing beyond that in the forward Estimates. The questions I have are around why is that, and given the significance of the reform agenda underway, what assurances can you provide the Disability Commissioner's office will be fully resourced into the future? That's the first question.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I can assure you it will be fully resourced into the future. But to explain how it's presented in the Budget, I'll ask the deputy secretary to speak to that.

Ms GRAY - Thanks. And through you, minister. We were provided the disability reform funding, and for the implementation of the Act, the Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act, and the establishment of the Office of the Disability Commissioner. The reform funding, because we're establishing something new, obviously, we don't know what we're going to need. We established it for the first couple of years and it will require consideration under future budgets submissions.

Ms WEBB - Once you get a sense of what the scope of the work is.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Is there funding for the Disability Inclusion Advisory Council, which you spoke about earlier, included in the Office of Disability Commissioner funding?

Ms PALMER - Yes. That's correct. .

Ms WEBB - And if so, what is the breakout amount for the council that sits within that? While you're doing that, one more quick one relating to the Office of Disability Commissioner. Recognising the Act only commenced last year, so there's been a short time that we've had the office there. Have there been any reports - can you give any data on reports or referrals made to the Disability Commissioner - obviously, nothing identifying - and if there's a regional breakdown, a regional breakdown of that data?

Ms PALMER - We'll certainly provide you with the data that we have here, and I'm just getting that other bit of information for you.

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister. The Disability Commissioner has published a progress report from 12 May to 31 December 2025 on the website. The report outlines that between 1 July and 12 December 2025 the commissioner received 120 reports and enquiries made under the Act. Of these, 51 reports have been accepted as reports on receipt that fall within the commissioner's jurisdiction under the Act. The commissioner also publishes a regular newsletter outlining activities to date, and the latest newsletter has been February 2026.

Ms WEBB - In terms of the data, though, that's an interesting reporting from last year, sort of the second half of the year but not quite. When do we expect there to be regular reporting on, say, the matters raised and that data-based information from the commissioner's office? Is it an annual report from hereon in?

Ms PALMER - Yes. It is, and it's tabled. It's given to me and then I believe I have five days to table that in, in both Houses of Parliament.

Ms WEBB - We'll see that in the second half of the year, for the 25-26 financial year?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that. That's it. Thank you.

Ms PALMER - I have that information, I believe. The total budget for DIAC this year is a maximum \$47,415, but in there we're talking about the payments to the council members.

Ms WEBB - That sits within that funding.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you. Appreciate that.

CHAIR - Thank you.

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Ms PALMER - I can also just add for the honourable member, the commissioner is due to hand her first annual report by 1 November.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Any Closing the Gap projects? I asked that at the start in this area. I know we've only got minutes to go, but perhaps just a quick update on Closing the Gap is good way to finish.

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister, and thank you for that really important question. Under Closing the Gap, we have a Disability Sector Strengthening Plan under priority reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The plan guides joint national efforts to build the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and their capacity to expand delivery of culturally safe and responsive disability support services. Tasmania and all other jurisdictions have provided endorsement of that plan.

The way we contribute to the Sector Strengthening Plan on Disability is largely through disability reform work; our actions we're responsible for with the royal commission; the National Disability Data Asset; Australia's Disability Strategy; and of course, implementation of our significant and historic Disability Rights Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024.

Ms WEBB - Nice work. Thank you for that update.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, and all your team that you've had with you today. It's been very good, and we're very appreciative. I also thank my team on this side for our fourth day, and for Gaye on Hansard, who's done an amazing job; and Julie and James. Really appreciate the work of everyone in getting Estimates finished. Thank you very much. Have a lovely weekend. I'm sure that you're looking forward to it coming up.

The committee adjourned at 6.28 p.m.