

Wednesday 5 June 2013 - Estimates Committee B (O'Connor) - Part 2

DIVISION 4

(Department of Health and Human Services)

Minister for Human Services

Output group 4

Human Services System Management -

Ms O'CONNOR - In broad terms the overall budget for human services is \$361.5 million and the breakdown into the outputs is: \$19.2 million for community support services; \$152.6 million for housing services; \$189.6 million for disability services.

Even though we are all aware that the budget context is one of, as we have discussed this morning, doing more with less and we have incorporated into the budget's frame \$29 million in new or continued commitments, a number of which were really core commitments that went back to the 2008-09 reform agenda around disability and family services in particular. In terms of the initiatives in this year's budget members would be aware that the Fair Work Australia decision that came down late last year awarded community sector workers a significant pay increase, between 19 per cent and 41 per cent.

The state's obligation under the Fair Work Australia decision was to meet around a third of the costs of that ERO decision. As a consequence members may recall that in last year's budget we made an allocation across the forward estimates of \$3 million in this past year, \$6 million, \$9 million, \$12 million. Having undertaken an exceptional body of work, in partnership with the community sector, which was the salary census we came to understand that that allocation would be insufficient to cover the projected cost of the pay increase and as such an extra \$6.2 million was allocated in this year's budget bringing the state's total contribution to \$58.3 million over the five years. I am sure we would all agree that that pay increase is very much deserved. Community sector workers have historically been amongst the most low paid workers within our community and they have very high levels of responsibility for some of our most vulnerable people.

Indexation is a discussion we have had at this table in previous years as part of the government's initial budget savings program in the 2011-12 budget. We reduced indexation to the community sector from 3.3 per cent to 2.25 per cent and we have maintained it at that level, but, that said, there was still an extra \$5 million out of the budget going towards indexation for the community sector in this coming year.

We should all be proud, as Tasmanians, that our commitment to people with disabilities will be further evidenced on 1 July when we join the NDIS launch, or the DisabilityCare Australia launch, which will reach around 960 to 1 000 young people between the ages of 15 to 24 as we move through to the launch of the full scheme on 1 July 2019. There has been allocation in this year's budget of an extra \$1.2 million on top of the \$17.9 million that the state already allocates to that cohort of young people and the total extra investment over the forward estimates is \$16.8 million. As we move through to the launch of the full scheme in 2019, the state's contribution will increase gradually by \$134 million until the full scheme launch when the state's

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contribution to meet the needs of around 10 600 Tasmanians living with a disability will be around \$230 million in that year.

We have reformed the way we disperse funds to disability organisations as a result of the unit pricing framework that we have implemented. Initially our calculations determined that it would cost around \$4 million but having, again, through the fantastic partnership work that we have with the sector, it is clearly going to cost more than that - around \$6.4 million per annum. There is an extra \$1 million in this year's budget to go towards the unit pricing framework. Very briefly, the benefit of a unit pricing framework to organisations cannot be overstated. It is for the first time an equitable and transparent framework for funding those fantastic disability service organisations within our community.

During the 2008-09 reforms extra funds were put towards increasing the individual support packages. We have more than doubled ISPs in the past five years so those reform moneys, which ran out this year, that were dedicated to individual support packages have now been maintained recurrently. That is an extra \$1.3 million a year and the wonderful family support, Gateways, will continue to be funded, as will the integrated family support services, as they must be.

There is an extra allocation of \$2 million this year and \$2 million next year towards neighbourhood house infrastructure upgrades and some of those houses, I am sure we would all agree, are in quite desperate need of improvement.

One area of the budget that I am particularly pleased we have been able to fund is the working with children and other vulnerable people checks framework. Tasmania has been the only Australian state or territory without a framework in place to make sure that we have a comprehensive risk assessment and police-checking process for people who choose to work with children, the elderly and people who have a disability. We now have funding allocated to establish a dedicated screening unit within the Department of Justice. This policy will reach across a number of government agencies including Justice, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. We are working collaboratively on establishing that and drafting up legislation that will be modelled on the ACT legislation. The ACT is the only other jurisdiction that has incorporated vulnerable people into its framework so this policy and the legislation will be implemented in a two-stage process. The first stage will establish a comprehensive system for people working with children, and then we will extend it to people working with other vulnerable people.

There has been a capital investment in this year's budget and next year's budget to a total of \$14 million to build the 46-unit supported accommodation facility at Trinity Hill in Church Street in Hobart, which will provide 30 units for young people who need support to access training, education, employment and other support opportunities. There will also be 16 units for young people with disabilities. The beauty of that site is it is right across the road from Elizabeth College, five minutes' walk from town. It is going to be a fantastic development that will be modelled in significant part on Thyne House in Launceston, that model of support and care.

In broad overview terms, that is the budget this year. I restate that we are still doing some excellent work through Housing on energy efficiency, as we talked about in this morning's hearing. I am happy to talk more about that later.

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CHAIR - Thank you, minister. We will do output group 4, Human Services system management, which is the first line. Minister, what is this concept we have seen across other areas in the budget? Can we have some more explanation, please?

Ms O'CONNOR - While I am loath to do this on the first question that has come to me from the committee in Human Services, I believe you will have a more thorough answer if I allow Mr Daly to answer that question around systems management.

CHAIR - Does that mean the question is too hard?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, it means it is intricate and internal to the department. I could give you a broad overview statement, but really what you want is the nub of the facts.

Mr DALY - The origins of the restructuring of the output groups for this budget is unfortunately steeped in the national health reform. As you are aware, we saw the transition and establishment of the three THOs as independent, board-governed organisations with whole sets of responsibilities. We now report their budgets for the first time, quite transparently, around what each THO is receiving. We applied that same principle to the Human Services portfolio so we could clearly and transparently show the investment [inaudible] is providing through us to the community in those key areas of Housing, Disability and Community Services. To show those that could not be specifically held against one of those output or service-related groups, we established system management groups. They carry a whole lot of costs such as depreciation and overheads that are carried across. This is the first year we have done it and Mike and his team have done a good job to get it done to this point. It will need further refinement with the sums of money in there because they are picking up some big-ticket items such as depreciation. In some cases there are still NGO grants held in these system management outputs, but we will refine that more and more so it will be very clear, to know what the output or service-oriented functions are and those that are providing either governance or planning and coordination type functions. This is the first year. It will be more refined next year so we can focus on the discussion on the outputs in terms of the community benefits and services that are provided, whether it be in the Health or the Human Services areas.

CHAIR - Minister, when are you expecting this refinement will be completed? Do you have some idea of that within this area?

[2.15 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - Within the agency?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr DALY - We will improve upon it for next year and each time we see an opportunity to make the investment clearer for the community, as well as for the parliament, about what we are investing specifically in the service-related outputs, like disability and housing et cetera, we will continue to make those refinements. Next year will be very close to the mark. As a part of ongoing improvement, I hope we will always be refining it to make it deliver that objective of clarity and transparency.

CHAIR - Fit for purpose.

Mr DALY - Yes. This is a first year's pass, but I think in next year's budget you will see they have done much more refinement.

CHAIR - Minister, the number in that team? Mr Daly talked about the team - Mike and his team - the number of staff?

Ms O'CONNOR - The number within the system?

CHAIR - In that team for that 4.1, human services systems management? Is there a number or are they not allocated specifically for that?

Ms BRESNEHAN - As Mr Daly said, the funds that are in that is for the whole agency. The component that relates to funds specifically for DHCS is my team, which consists of three, myself, my EA and one senior project officer. Not much.

CHAIR - Not a large number at all.

Ms O'CONNOR - Very lean and efficient.

CHAIR - Another one doing more with less. We will be watching to see how that refinement takes place and how it unfolds in the year ahead.

Output group 5 Human Services

5.1 Community services -

Mrs TAYLOR - I am a little thrown because I was going to ask you, minister, first of all for a bit of a breakdown on what that community services budget is about, but having just received all these papers that you have given - there is a whole lot of stuff in here, which gives more answers than -

Ms O'CONNOR - More detail than the budget.

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes. Can I ask you if you are going to do this next year, could you give it to us the week before?

Ms O'CONNOR - Love to.

Mrs TAYLOR - That might save us and we would be able to direct our questions.

Ms O'CONNOR - The first thing I would like to say, Mrs Taylor, is that I would love to be sitting in this chair at this time next year and discussing the budget with you.

Laughter.

Ms O'CONNOR - The second thing is that these papers we prepared for TasCOSS as well as for the committee and they really are just core facts about what is happening in the portfolio. I am glad you appreciate them.

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Mrs TAYLOR - Can I make the comment then to the department, Minister, in case you are not sitting in this chair next year and there is another minister sitting in this chair.

CHAIR - We never assume here.

Mrs TAYLOR - Regardless of whether the current government is returned or not, it may not be the same minister. Pass that on to the department to thank them for those facts and it would be really nice to have them before estimates rather than to be handed them on the day.

Minister, would you like to just give us a bit of a breakdown on what exactly the \$17.765 million is going to be spent on.

Ms O'CONNOR - Excuse me; it is \$19.2 million.

Mrs TAYLOR - The decrease in community services' budget primarily reflects more accurate allocation of overheads to the children's service output, so that has gone from there, which I understand is why you now have less. Tell me basically what you are going to spend it on.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am happy to give a more detailed breakdown. But, in broad terms, the community services section of the portfolio covers services relating to planning, developing and managing family and community support services throughout the state. Do you want the comparative breakdown from last this to this year?

Mrs TAYLOR - No, I would like you to say broadly where the bulk of the money is going to be spent and on what areas.

Ms O'CONNOR - In community services, in 2013-14, family support will have \$11.64 million invested in it; family violence, \$329 000; neighbourhood houses, close to \$4.9 million; personal and family counselling, \$896 640; sexual assault support services, \$868 496; and the equal remuneration order within this year, \$613 500. Did you want a breakdown of how our the community support levy is spent?

Mrs TAYLOR - That would be good.

Ms O'CONNOR - Under the Gaming Control Act 1993, 4 per cent of the profits of pubs and clubs are directed into a community support levy, 25 per cent of which goes for grants for sporting and recreation clubs, 25 per cent for grants for charitable organisation and 50 per cent for the provision of research into gambling services for the prevention of compulsive treatment, rehabilitation of compulsive gamblers and also for community education and other health services. I can advise the committee that total player losses in 2011-12 -and this does not include TOTE and punting on the horses - were \$285 million, which is quite similar to previous years. In 2011-12, Tasmanians lost \$208 million on poker machines, which is down from \$216 million in the previous year. We are seeing a gradual decline in the amount of money Tasmanians are losing to these pernicious machines. These are placed in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage for a specific purpose, as we know. Some of that decline will be put down to the impact of the education and awareness programs - the fact we have, in the past to years, focused a lot of effort on an exceptional community awareness campaign. It includes the Know Your Odds campaign that reaches out across all media forms but also involves things like sponsorship of the Hobart Chargers and the Devon Netball Club up in the north-west coast. As poker machine revenue is

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declining, there has also been some worrying trends around online gambling, particularly amongst younger males. That is a really worrying national trend.

Mrs TAYLOR - You do not have figures on that because it is not controlled, have you, minister?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is very hard to definitive information on that, although the University of Tasmania did a really good survey a couple of years ago that was more of a qualitative survey about why people gamble.

Mrs TAYLOR - In your gambler's support program and gambler's help services, are you targeting the new way of gambling as well?

Ms O'CONNOR - We try to target across all form of gambling. The Know Your Odds campaign has quite a direct focus on electronic gaming machines, but the broad message is that the more you gamble, the more you are going to lose. We are always looking at ways to reach out into vulnerable communities. I have seen Know Your Odds material, for example, at universities. Having young people like the Hobart Chargers or the Devon Netball Club being able to convey that message is a really important part of bringing down the prevalence of gambling. We also have, as part of our education initiative, the Know Your Odds stage 3 advertising campaign, which started in February this year. It is a really exceptional gambling and young people's resource for teachers and school staff which I launched late last year. The Hobart Chargers Basketball Club and the wonderful Know Your Odds flashmob competition took place as part of responsible gambling awareness week in the past couple of weeks. That has involved school students, young people from colleges and senior groups in doing flashmob activities as part of a competition to raise awareness about the perils of problem gambling.

Mrs TAYLOR - Are you using social media at all?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, we do use social media. I do not have the specific details of that with me but certainly as part of working with young children we are using online resources.

Mrs TAYLOR - Sorry, I interrupted you. You had just got to the amount of gamblers. Elder abuse?

Ms O'CONNOR - I would really like to talk about elder abuse. The elder abuse prevention strategy, the funding of which was cut in the 2011-12 budget, has nonetheless been highly effective. It has involved a range of components to the strategy. There is a statewide awareness campaign which includes television ads, print and radio, posters, bookmarks - that type of material. We have also established an elder abuse helpline, which is 1800 661 149. The elder abuse helpline, which is run by Advocacy Tasmania and started in August last year, has been highly effective. It is very worrying, of course - we have just received the statistics until 31 March and there have been 120 cases of elder abuse reported to the helpline.

A case refers to each situation reported to the helpline of an allegation of an older person being abused. A case can be one call to the helpline or a number of calls. Seventy per cent of the calls to the helpline were in relation to older women; 41.6 per cent of the calls received were in relation to a person who was aged 80 or above; 43.3 per cent have become from older Tasmanians who are experiencing abuse; 31.6 per cent have been from concerned family members; 43.3 per cent indicated that they found out about the helpline through the television promotions - so that is

why an integrated strategy works; 55.8 per cent of the cases identified financial material abuse - and the evidence demonstrates that financial abuse is the most prevalent form of elder abuse; 68.3 per cent of cases cited psychological emotional abuse, which was often identified together with financial abuse. Twenty-two referrals were made, of which 50 per cent were referred to Advocacy Tasmania for advocacy support and 60 per cent were provided with formal information, for example, concerning legal services, medical support and family violence and support services.

Another component of the strategy was that the Department of Health and Human Services has issued practice guidelines for people who work in the sector with older Tasmanians - and this is for government and non-government employees. The practice guidelines document is an exceptional body of work that takes workers through how to identify elder abuse, how to respond to the person who feels they are being abused or is raising an allegation of abuse, what the referral pathways are and what the law says. Those practice guidelines have been issued along with training programs that are being undertaken in June and July this year.

[2.30 p.m.]

The other component of our elder abuse prevention strategy is to bring in amendments to the Powers of Attorney Act and the Guardianship and Administration Act which relate specifically to the financial affairs of an older person but also their physical care and wellbeing under the Guardianship and Administration Act. We expect those legislative amendment to come in in the not-too-distant future. On less money we have been able to deliver a highly effective strategy but it has revealed what we knew, which is that there is a worry of elder abuse within our community.

Mrs TAYLOR - It appears from the papers you have just given me that this is the final year of the strategy coming up.

Ms O'CONNOR - This is the final year of the funded strategy but I can indicate to the committee that it is now government policy to have an elder abuse prevention strategy in place. The main funding component of it is the community awareness campaign but we have the raw material of that so we don't have to reinvent the wheel there, and the helpline. We just have to make sure that continues so we are looking for funding sources both internally and also through the commonwealth.

Mrs TAYLOR - Was this commonwealth money?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, this was a state allocation made in the 2010-11 budget that I negotiated with former Treasurer Michael Aird.

Mrs TAYLOR - We will hope that budget continues into the forward years.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is now government policy.

Mrs TAYLOR - The TasEquip project is another component of that.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, a quick update on TasEquip. I think Mr Finch was on the committee with me where we heard from so many people living with disabilities and their families and carers about the extreme difficulty people had in obtaining the equipment and assistive technology they needed. We made an allocation in the 2010 budget of \$4 million over the forward estimates. We have invested that in a number of ways, some in some new equipment. I will take you through it.

A total of \$567 000 is being spent over five years on an information management system that will ensure no matter where you live in Tasmania, if you need to access or an upgrade to your equipment to assist you live as independently as possible, there will be an information platform there that is very user-friendly and has within it all the equipment available. The system that has been in place does not have any of those things. The IT system we are installing, which I think will be operational by 30 June, has been used in the National Health System community equipment schemes across the UK for the last 14 years and will enable rigorous management of equipment across the state, reduce the paperwork for frontline clinical staff for online ordering, enable more efficient distribution and use of equipment across the state and provide a robust reporting mechanism.

We have invested through TasEquip money in WiFi and 3G-enabled handheld barcode scanners. We are investing \$25 000 in improving the IT structure in the THO community equipment schemes to improve bandwidth and IT infrastructure. I can advise that approximately \$1.5 million per year is spent by the THOs across the state on equipment, assistive technologies, repairs and replacing equipment, and \$575 420 of additional reform funding has been provided this financial year-to-date by TasEquip, Home and Community Care and the independent funding unit to purchase the equipment for clients.

Mrs TAYLOR - So you're basically spending half of this year's \$1 million on that last item?

Ms GANLEY - Probably about \$350 000 of that \$500 000 is from the TasEquip funding but we also had some funding provided through the Home and Community Care program. The individual funding unit has some slippage funds and that was pooled together. The \$1 million covers the investment in the information management system and the project officer we have running the project, as well as equipment purchases.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you, that is good. Minister, I should ask you about staff.

Ms O'CONNOR - Staffing numbers in DHHS.

Mrs TAYLOR - Changes in staffing numbers in this area would be useful.

Ms O'CONNOR - In Human Services, rather than a breakdown into outputs at this point, we have 280.4 FTEs across the portfolio, which represents an increase of 1.4 FTEs from the 279 that were recorded as at 1 July last year. Since the commencement of the budget savings strategy the total number of FTEs has reduced by 34 or 10.8 per cent from the 314.3 FTEs recorded at 1 July 2011. No overtime was recorded across the Human Services portfolio in 2012-13 or 2011-12.

Mrs TAYLOR - You basically do not have a great deal of change between 2012-13 and 2013-14, but you have \$30 million less in your total budget for Human Services.

Ms O'CONNOR - I might ask Mr Daly to explain. We made the substantial savings in the 2011-12 state budget that from memory totalled close to \$15 million.

Mr DALY - There were two very large sums come out that have no material impact on the operation of Human Services, again as a result of national health reform - the tentacles reach everywhere don't they? Instead of the funding NGOs under the HACC program through the state

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and hence through this portfolio, the commonwealth is now funding those NGOs direct, so they have taken that money out from last year. There has also been a change in payroll tax.

Mrs TAYLOR - So there are no loss of services and no loss of staff.

Ms O'CONNOR - In terms of the staff movement in Disability, Housing and Community Services over the past budget year there is a pay period assessment. The first one is 7 July 2012 and the staffing numbers were 276 FTEs and for 2013 it is 277.4 FTEs. That increase of 1.4 is the senior practitioner role established under the Disability Services Act 2011. It is a very important role, particularly around use of restrictive practices for people living with a disability. In terms of the breakdown in the specific areas of the portfolio, there are three dedicated staff in the Family Support unit and two in the Community Support unit.

CHAIR - What about the level of sick leave and those other areas that are always illuminating to the committee? How stressful is the department to work in?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is a very human Human Services agency, but there will always be some issues around workers compensation. I can advise the committee that in 2011-12 financial year there were four claims within Disability Housing Community Services at a total cost of \$1.355 million and in the year to date - that is at 30 March this year - there have been two claims at a total cost of \$567 000.

No stress-related claims were received in 2011-12 but as at 30 March 2013 one stress-related worker's compensation claim has been received, which represents 50 per cent of total workers compensation claims received in 2012-13.

Mr DEAN - Across the department have there been any complaints of assaults or abuse on officers, and I am thinking mainly of the housing area?

Ms O'CONNOR - Certainly none that have been reported to me. I have just received some advice from the director of housing, there have been no formal claims lodged by housing staff as a result of them undertaking their daily working activities but, understandably, there are incidents from time to time, particularly involving tenancy officers who are at that interface with tenants.

CHAIR - Consultancies for across the agency?

Ms O'CONNOR - I have a table here that I am happy to table but the total cost of recurrent consultancies in the human services area of the agency is \$253 479 and that covers things like Cleminger Tasmania Pty Ltd, the advertising agency's involvement in the Know Your Odds campaign. 3p Consulting undertook a mid-term review of the disability gateways. We have Aquality Builders undertaking Housing Tasmania's inspections in Launceston. There are a significant number of consultancies - not high cost consultancies but nonetheless some cost - that are related to the bushfire and the bushfire recovery team and they total \$85 661. I can advise the committee that in our capital consultancy area we have spent \$952 910 to 31 March this year.

[2.45 p.m.]

With the proposed development at Trinity Hill, Church Street, we need architectural drawings in order to consult with the local community so that people have a clearer picture of what that development might look like. Planners, architects, engineers, are the sorts of expertise that once

upon a time government used to have within it, but now longer does. We used to build buildings in government once upon a time, but we don't any more.

Dr GOODWIN - Were there any redundancies this financial year?

Ms O'CONNOR - As at 30 March 2013, three employees separated from the Human Services portfolio through targeted voluntary redundancy arrangements. In 2012-13 the average targeted voluntary redundancies payment has been \$36 000 with total payments of \$109 000. In the previous year, 2011-12, 37 employees separated from the agency in the Human Services portfolio at a cost to the taxpayer of \$2.3 million. The average cost of each separation in 2011-12 was \$61 461. Redundancies taken up this year were part of normal ongoing business portfolio.

Dr GOODWIN - Any positions vacant at the moment?

Ms O'CONNOR - In 2012-13, 44 vacancies have been advertised in the *Gazette* to the 1 May this year across Human Services, and that is an increase of 27, or 158.8 per cent from the 17 vacancies advertised in the 10 months to 1 May 2012. While we exercise strong controls over staffing levels, we need to replace required positions across the portfolio and make sure that those areas of the agency involved in policy and service delivery are appropriately staffed. The number of vacancies advertised does not translate directly to an increase in staffing levels, with the increase of 27 FTEs representing 2.3 per cent of total advertisements in the Tasmanian Government *Gazette*. So overall staffing levels have stayed steady.

Dr GOODWIN - Would you break down the family support allocation? I think you said it was about \$11.64 million. I am wondering what sits under that.

Ms O'CONNOR - We will provide the detail.

I have the practice guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Human Services on elder abuse. It is very good; it provides a definition of elder abuse and looks at some of the literature from around the world on what elder abuse is and how to respond to it. It is also online. It is an exceptional document.

Mr DEAN - I am not sure whether the question was asked, minister, as to the gambling support levy. Have you been asked to provide a list of where those grants have gone to? I am interested in where they are going to, what for, and the amounts.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am happy to table that list.

Mr DEAN - Is an effort made to satisfy as many of those grants as you can? Are there sufficient moneys coming into that levy now to satisfy the grants or is there a backlog of applications?

Ms O'CONNOR - There are always going to be successful and unsuccessful applications as a result of the disbursement of these funds. The community support levy grants round offers grants of up to \$10 000. I have a list of organisations that have been successful under that most recent grants program - that is, 2011-12. The criteria that are used are fundamentally about engaging the community in healthy alternatives to gambling. They are highly effective for a small spend.

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Mr DEAN - It is 4 per cent, is it not, of moneys going through that is paid into this levy?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, of profits from pubs and clubs.

Mr DEAN - What is that bringing in each year?

Ms O'CONNOR - In 2012-13 the community support levy funding totalled \$4.8 million.

Mr DEAN - Do we know whether all that was paid out in that year?

Ms O'CONNOR - Some of those small grant funds are rolled forward into the following year.

Mr DEAN - Where is the balance? Is the balance building up in this levy?

Ms O'CONNOR - We do not have spare funds. In direct gambling support, problem gambling prevention services, it is just over \$1 million; community education is \$504 000; research undertaken by Treasury of the social and economic impact study work - which is about to begin again - \$90 000; the operations of the gambling support program within the department is \$303 790; and there is an allocation made to the Neighbourhood House program of \$580 378. That is a total of \$2.313 million. In the grants round, in 2011-12 the small grants round had \$230 558 directed towards it. In 2012-13, the small grants round had increased to \$369 442, but there was a carry-forward in that year of \$56 000. In broad terms, there is around \$300 000 a year that goes out into the community support levy grants rounds and I have here an attachment which I will table of some of the successful grant applications.

Mr DEAN - Is there a committee that sits to determine the grants that are going out?

Ms O'CONNOR - There is and I have the information. I have read it in the past few days of who sits on that committee, but obviously I don't have it here. It does have on it representatives from the gambling support program. I recall Nerilie Gilson, Ben Ross -

Ms GANLEY - That is right, liquor and gaming representatives sit on it, a community sector organisation - TasCOSS - and other peak body representatives.

Mr DEAN - My next question - and it was raised in another place in relation to grants the other day, - was that you have professionals that are able to put these applications in for grants and normally they are successful because they know where to tick off and what to dot and what not to, but what about those who aren't so professional, minister, that make the applications - and I had a couple involved in this - where they are not so good at putting their submissions together? What sort of support is given to those people? Are those submissions taken back for them to cover the right areas?

Ms O'CONNOR - I can indicate, and you will see from the list that I tabled earlier, that there are many organisations that are not professional grant-writing organisations. It is not necessarily something that we flag widely, but we are available to assist organisations to make their grant applications and it is something that our community partnership team can be involved in.

CHAIR - How many of those grants, minister, are ongoing grants that these organisations rely on year in year out?

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Ms O'CONNOR - We do not disburse recurrent funds at the community service support level. It is a bit like the Tasmanian Community Fund grants round.

CHAIR - Once you've had one, you are out?

Ms O'CONNOR - A number of them are small projects that community organisations undertake and so they just need a specific amount of one-off funding. They are projects often around a theme that we fund. For example, the Mt Lyell-Strahan Picnic Committee we contributed \$2 000 out of the CSL grants to the Mt Lyell-Strahan annual picnic. There is a good one there - Positive Solutions was awarded \$9 916 for using mediation to support the drive to prevent elder abuse; funds towards the Cape Barren Island Aboriginal men's group.

CHAIR - Rosebery Community House has been very successful.

Ms O'CONNOR - They have; I noticed that the other day when I was reading my briefs again.

Mr DEAN - They know how to do it.

CHAIR - Six grants.

Ms O'CONNOR - They are doing very well in budget cooking, cake decorating, their men's shed, photography, short filmmaking and winter warmers. Good on them.

Mr DEAN - The other question, minister, and I think you said you cannot provide the figure or it is difficult, in relation to the gambling support area of the numbers of people who are involved in those programs and the number of people who are being supported throughout that program. There would have to be, I would have thought, some indication somewhere from the department of the numbers who are involved in these programs.

Ms O'CONNOR - There certainly would be because it is a part of our funding agreement with Anglicare and Relationships Australia. We will take that one on notice. I can indicate that there has been a decline in the number of people who are accessing those gambling support services - in fact, quite a significant decline.

Mr DEAN - Minister, in those figures I was going to ask if they could be provided back for three years because that will give an indication of whether it is going up, down or what.

Ms O'CONNOR - I can indicate that it is a really interesting trend. We have a graph here that shows new registrations. For face-to-face counselling services there has been a decline in demand for 2011-12; new clients in 2010-11 were 358; in 2011-12 in the same period was 290 new clients. The peak was in 2008-09 when 405 new clients signed up for face-to-face counselling.

[3.00 p.m.]

As to the Gamblers Helpline Tasmania clinical calls, you can see from the graph there has been a gradual decline in the number of people who are accessing those services. There is a relatively broad community understand those services are available, but it reflects the decline in gambling revenue from poker machines.

Mr DEAN - It is an indication that some of the strategies are working. Is the graph going to be tabled?

Ms O'CONNOR - We will get a copy for you.

CHAIR - Minister, could you expand on one of your initiatives - the checks for people working with children and vulnerable people? There has been an allocation of \$700 000, I believe?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is \$700 000 in this year and \$200 000 in the next year.

CHAIR - It talks about 'establishing a more comprehensive checking process to reduce risk of sexual, physical, emotional and financial harm and neglect'. Could the committee have some understanding of how all that is going to be undertaken and how that \$700 000 is going to achieve that?

Ms O'CONNOR - The first thing I would say about this new funded policy is that in 2009 Tasmania agreed, under the COAG framework, to be part of a national system of comprehensive police checking and risk assessment for people working with children. At this point we are still the only Australian jurisdiction that does not have that system in place and the disadvantage to us as a jurisdiction is we cannot access that national criminal tracking system. We provide information when another jurisdiction comes to us looking for information about a particular individual and, so long as it is appropriate, we will provide that information to the other jurisdiction. There are around 25 000 police checks carried out in Tasmania every year. The Department of Education undertakes its own checking system. This policy will enable us to undertake a much more sophisticated risk assessment process around a particular individual. I am sure members would be agreed that maybe a police check does not tell the whole story about an individual's suitability to work with children or other vulnerable people. It tells you one aspect potentially of a person's situation. The actual assessment will do a police check which will look at criminal activity, spent convictions, past employment history, any child protection concerns that may surround that individual, any family violence history, disciplinary action that has been taken towards that person, whether the person has been convicted for animal cruelty - as we know, cruelty towards animals can be a very strong indicator of other violent tendencies. We will be able to exchange this information at a national level.

In the UK when they introduced this system, they implemented such an onerous, almost oppressive system that it dissuaded good people from working in the sector and from volunteering. They had to retreat and change that policy framework. We do not want to go down that path. We do not want to discourage volunteerism in Tasmania but we have to make sure we have the right people working with our young people, our elderly and people living with a disability. No-one should think this system is the key to every aspect of making sure that our children and vulnerable people are in safe environments. It is one component of a quality and safety framework. There is legislation being drafted as we speak. We will be consulting thoroughly with people who have a stake and an interest in this area.

CHAIR - It is going to rely heavily on police and court records, is that correct?

Ms O'CONNOR - It will rely in part on police and court records. It will rely on us having good contacts and networks here and interstate. But, ultimately, it should make sure that, to some

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extent, the people who are working with children and other vulnerable people are the right people to be working in those areas.

CHAIR - The system that will be put in place will have to be compatible with the police system and the court system or is it going to be something more person-to-person phoning of organisations. How is that going to work?

Ms O'CONNOR - Some of the finer details about how it applies we are still working through because we have only just received confirmation of the funding. This a centralised screening unit that will reside in the Department of Justice and as part of the consultation and policy development process that we are going through now, we are working with Police and Emergency Management. What we are proposing is that once a person goes through the police checking and risk assessment process that they would carry with them a card, whether they are a paid employee or a volunteer. That would be in place for three years and it is transferable across jobs. It is a licence to work with some of our more vulnerable citizens.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is really one of the issues at the moment - that it is not transferable. If you work with a couple of community organisations or with children, you have to get a police check done each time and it costs money and effort.

Ms O'CONNOR - It will cost money for a person who is applying for a police check and risk assessment, whether they are a paid employee or a volunteer. We are still working through what the costs may be. But it will be part of the cost to an individual of becoming employed or changing jobs.

Mrs TAYLOR - There are lots of organisations. If you want volunteers, then you either subsidise that or pay for it.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, that is right. Some employers may wish to subsidise that application.

CHAIR - Given that you in the early stages of this project, when do you expect to have it up and running?

Ms O'CONNOR - We expect the legislation to be tabled later this year, and hopefully passed through the two Houses. Then we will go about making sure that the screening unit is in place. All that work around the establishment and the screening unit is already under way. I can foresee that the legislation will be from 1 July next year. Our intention is for the law to be enacted by the middle of next year.

CHAIR - Why do you need the \$700 000 upfront, when really you probably need the \$700 000 next year? Will you carry that balance over or will it get sucked away as other funds do?

Ms O'CONNOR - Not in the Department of Human Services; we spend very wisely. That initial start-up money is for the establishment of the IT platform and the process that will wrap around the new policy.

CHAIR - Which will be needed before 1 July next year?

Ms O'CONNOR - That is right.

Dr GOODWIN - Because this unit is going to be in Justice, as I understand it, will that money end up going across to Justice to purchase IT, or not?

Ms O'CONNOR - DHHS is responsible for formulating and developing the policy and also the drafting process for the legislation but ultimately it will be driven through the Department of Justice. I can indicate that a number of agencies are also sourcing funds internally to contribute towards the establishment of that screening unit and the processes it will deliver.

Dr GOODWIN - There is only funding for over 2013-14 and 2014-15, so what is the expectation after that?

Ms O'CONNOR - The expectation after that is that the unit becomes effectively self-funding.

Dr GOODWIN - Because people will have to pay.

Ms O'CONNOR - That's right.

CHAIR - So the Police department and the Justice department are looking for funds as we speak to contribute to their part of this project?

Ms O'CONNOR - Some of it might be in kind contributions from the agencies in terms of human resources policy expertise, not necessarily hard cash in anyone's bank account.

Dr GOODWIN - There would be quite a bit of work involved in those checks from what you have outlined. The intention that they would be valid for how long?

Ms O'CONNOR - Three years.

Dr GOODWIN - Do we have any idea how many people we are talking about?

Ms O'CONNOR - The figures I have seen estimate that potentially somewhere between 15 per cent and 17 per cent of the population may be affected by this policy change and we are very conscious of the need to get this framework right. We do not want to make it too onerous a process for people, particularly those who are volunteering, but we really need to have this policy in place.

Dr GOODWIN - I completely understand that but there a lot of community groups and volunteer organisations that might need it.

Ms O'CONNOR - That is right, and that is why we are going to put a lot of effort into the consultative process.

5.2 Disability services -

Mr GAFFNEY - Minister, this is a big-ticket item but it plays a significant role with individuals and families so I understand that, but I have to say it is a difficult portfolio to follow, just because of the relationships between funding and the national reforms and different funding

packages, so I apologise if I repeat questions to try to link it together. The budget papers say this output provides services related to planning, development and management of Disability Services and they include disability policy and programs, disability assessment and advisory services, individual support packages and community partnerships. Can you give an indication of what those four areas would cost or where the money lies, just so it gives us some idea of where the main funding is?

[3.15 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - The main funding is in direct service delivery. Of the total Disability budget, the vast bulk is disbursed in grants to community organisations: accommodation support, \$97 million; community access, \$24.7 million; and community support, \$19.7 million. Our recurrent allocation for individual support packages is \$14.8 million; respite, \$8.5 million; peak organisations, \$139 529; information and advocacy services, \$2.78 million; Home and Community Care, effectively \$4.2 million; and other, \$401 472, and if you want some detail on those, I am happy to find that out for you. The equal remuneration order allocation in this year is \$5.346 million. The total disbursement to community sector organisations is \$163.1 million, which is 88 per cent of the total Disability budget.

Mr GAFFNEY - With the \$97 million for accommodation, I want to understand table 5.4. I am looking at accommodation and support clients in table 5.16. In table 5.4 it says the actual was \$1.280 million and then in 2011-12, it was \$1.301 million. My question is to understand the accommodation support clients. In 2011-12 it was \$1.301 million; in 2012-13 the target was \$1.355 million; and in 2013-14 the target is \$1.355 million. Do you have the actual figures for 2012-13?

Ms O'CONNOR - The year to date - so as at end of March - the actual accommodation support client numbers were \$1.299 million.

Mr GAFFNEY - The target for 2013-14 is \$1.355 million. If the support accommodation waiting list is 167 going down to 111, what is the relationship between the people waiting for support and the people who get the support, the clients? Is there a correlation? How do you figure out in 2012-13 the target of 167 and you did not achieve the \$1.355 million, and then this year's client waiting list is less. I am just trying to understand how you come up with those figures or what that means.

Ms O'CONNOR - To provide clarity around those line items in the budget, accommodation support is to provide support for people to live independently in their homes. Supported accommodation -

Mr GAFFNEY - The waiting list is different.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, they are definitely different waiting lists; supported accommodation, for example, includes group homes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. The budget papers say a small team has been established within Disability Services to oversee the DisabilityCare Australia for NDIS?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - I think it is like only three or four; is that correct?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is four.

Mr GAFFNEY - I attended a forum recently where one of the four was the guest speaker and it was very good. The people there were not at all worried about the transfer to the NDIS scheme and that was carers and people who work within it. Obviously a lot of work had been done beforehand to get to that point so I was quite pleased. I want to ask a few questions about the NDIS again, because I need to understand that fully for some of the other questions. The funding totalling \$16.8 million over the four years, do you believe that it is adequate funding for the amount of people you have to cater for or do you have to make the hat fit the bucket?

Ms O'CONNOR - Are you talking about what is called the launch, itself, which begins on 1 July?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms O'CONNOR - We signed a bilateral agreement with the commonwealth on each of our individual and shared responsibilities surrounding the launch. We have made a commitment of funds to establish and progress the launch, and under our agreement with the commonwealth if there are, for some reason or another, new clients and an increase in likely costs then the commonwealth will cover the extra costs.

We have undertaken some very detailed work on this cohort - what services they receive and what increased support needs they may have as a result of the launch. We have a pretty clear picture of the circumstances surrounding these 960 young Tasmanians. The cost projections we have worked through with the commonwealth and the agency are quite sound because there is already \$17.9 million going towards this cohort currently. That is established funding towards these young people so we are making some top-up funds from the state and then the commonwealth is making its investment on top of that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Was it 65:35? What was the percentage?

Ms O'CONNOR - For the launch it is 60:40 so the state provides the 60 per cent and for the full scheme the state contributes 49 and the commonwealth 51 per cent of the costs.

Mr GAFFNEY - I know the age group is 15 to 24 so is that a direct transfer or can new people coming in to the age of 15, how do you become eligible to access the NDIS scheme in Tasmania?

Ms O'CONNOR - There are a set of rules that have been agreed with the commonwealth around the launch and they will be available. A person has to reside in Tasmania and be within that age cohort. For example, if a young person turns 15 next year they will be eligible under that launch process.

Mr GAFFNEY - If a family does transfer from the mainland how long would they have to be here to be eligible?

Ms O'CONNOR - This issue has been raised by other jurisdictions because, for example, the New South Wales launch in the Hunter Valley, which covers something like 10 000 people, there is a real concern that people will move up from Sydney into the Hunter Valley so that they can

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access the services they have needed for a very long time. The eligibility process around our launch is that an individual will need to have resided in Tasmania for 12 months prior to entering the launch or that there are exceptional circumstances. This is not intended to be an exclusive or punitive process.

Mr GAFFNEY - That was one of the things I was impressed about with the forum is it was stated very clearly it would be an individual case-by-case look, because that is the important thing with families and disabilities. I was quite comforted by the fact that was how they were approaching it and so were others in the room. What other resources, aside from financial, have been requested of your staff?

Ms O'CONNOR - Ms Ingrid Ganley is 24 carat solid gold and has been working on the establishment of the NDIS in Tasmania in a very full-time way, as well as full-time doing her other duties within the department for the best part of 18 months, and so has Nick Evans from the Department of Community Development Division. There have been a number of people from across agencies working on this quite intensively in the past for more than a year. These individuals, the 960 young people between 15 and 24, are currently clients of Disability and Community Services in Tasmania - or not clients, some of them will not be currently receiving services. In order for us to move through to the launch the people within the State Department of Disability and Community Services have had to work very closely with individuals and their families. We have had to obtain consent to share that information with the agency. We have prepared information and material to go to these clients, their families and carers. There has been a very significant amount of work. The whole bilateral negotiations at a senior officer level were undertaken in DHHS and DPAC, a huge amount of human resources. The agency itself, so the Launch Transition Agency, has been co-located with Disability and Community Services. We have had federal and state bureaucrats working together to make sure that the launch is successful.

Ms GANLEY - Answering the question all of disability services is really involved in getting ready for the launch and that includes working with our current client group and providing that information, identifying where they are, working very closely with our service providers to ensure that they have the right information about what it means for them to transfer across. It is really our significant agenda for the next few years.

Mr GAFFNEY - Last year there were about 6 600 people receiving specific disability services and now we have this cohort going under the scheme. What impacts may that have on the other 5 600 people who are going to be and hopefully you will say, 'No, financially it will be fine'. That is what I want to hear.

Ms O'CONNOR - Our goal has to been to ensure that the transition into the launch for those young people is seamless and stress-free, and that there is no diminution or disruption to the level of support that is provided. In terms of the other 5 500 current clients of Disability and Community Services they will continue to receive the supports that they currently receive. As we move towards the full scheme in 2019, in a staged process after the launch ends in 2016, we will be moving more and more clients through to 1 July 2019. We expect to have around 10 600 Tasmanians living with a disability exercising choice and control over the supports that they need. It is the most wonderful reform.

[3:30 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY - Tasmania provides a reasonable level of funding for people with disabilities - I think the average is about \$8 600 per person. To some it could be much higher, so

under the NDIS how do you quantify funding who gets more of the pie for the special needs of the disabilities and that sort of thing? Is it case managed?

Ms O'CONNOR - That is right. It is part of the individualised process. There is the initial assessment process and clients can undertake a self-assessment process. If an individual is eligible to receive support under DisabilityCare Australia, they go into a process that is very one-on-one around developing an individualised plan for that person and there will be costings attached to the level of reasonable and necessary support a person may need. It is about tailoring the funds to the individual's needs, which is a process we go through currently. The difference with DisabilityCare Australia will be that instead of having to ration the funds and services, as we currently do, if you are eligible for support from DisabilityCare Australia you will receive the support you need. Also, your support needs may change over your life's journey, so there will be reassessment and tailoring again of the support packages attached around the person so they can have more choice and control in their lives.

Mr GAFFNEY - I like the idea of self-management of funding. That has a bonus because one of the questions we asked in Transport to minister McKim was: what impact might the NDIS scheme have on rural and regional parts of Tasmania where there are limited services for transport for people with disabilities? Has there been any consideration? As people move through from 15 to 24, when they need to get on a bus or catch a taxi, how does that relationship work? What is your relationship with other agencies now that the NDIS is coming on? It is going to impact on some other agencies.

Ms O'CONNOR - It will impact on the work of some other agencies. Since the philosophy of the NDIS was established, it has been very important to send out the message that the NDIS is not designed to replace mainstream core business of government agencies. For example, in education, the needs of children, students with disabilities within the school environment will remain the responsibility of the Department of Education. There will be health and community services that must be available to all citizens and that will still be part of a person with disability getting around and living as independently as possible. That said, DisabilityCare Australia will not fund transport upgrades in rural and regional areas. There are a whole lot of other areas of need within our community, not just for people with disabilities but for people who are elderly, have mental health challenges, or are on very low incomes and living in rural and regional areas. That is why we have the Social Inclusion Unit in government, to look at some of those barriers to social inclusion; transport comes in on a regular basis as one of the barriers that people face in being connected to their community. DisabilityCare Australia is not going to solve all those challenges.

Ms BRESNEHAN - You are quite right, there are a lot of issues that surround the introduction of the scheme. That is one of the reasons they are doing trials, or staged launches. We have mentioned before that we are developing guidelines and rules about how it is all going to work. A part of what will happen during the trial is clarifying some of these roles and responsibilities and letting it run a bit, seeing what needs to be tightened and agreeing on where things are. But the minister is quite right, we need to keep the responsibilities in the agencies where they currently are and it is a question then of how it knits together with a new agency and a new process. The rules will guide that and it will be informed by the trial process.

Mr GAFFNEY - That will be really important and I might be wrong here. The unit price framework that you have trialled was expected to be \$4 million; I think phase 3 starts on 1 July 2013 and already, when it was \$4 million, you have reassessed it and it has gone out to

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\$6.4 million. Is that something that concerns you with your assessment of this, or is that a different type of modelling so that you are expecting that extra resource that needed to go into that unit price framework trial?

Ms GANLEY - The implementation of unit pricing has brought all our organisations up to an efficient and effective price, that is, looking at fully costing, what it costs to deliver disability services. The move to DisabilityCare Australia will see a model where it is fully costed delivery of services. We are now in a position in Tasmania where our system is quite well funded and is at the unit price range and DisabilityCare will continue that. It will be paying what the market rate is for the delivery of services.

Mr GAFFNEY - That is probably an advantage.

Ms GANLEY - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - The mid-term review of the Gateway program: is that to be released soon and how has that been effective in delivering disability services? Can someone give me a rundown on where that is at or when the report is to be released?

Ms O'CONNOR - I am happy to do that. We undertook an internal review of the Family Support Gateway which came in, as we expected it would, saying it delivered a really important service to our 3 500 Tasmanian families a year. The Disability Gateway services started in August 2010. At any given time, what we do know is that the local area coordinators in the Disability Gateway are actively supporting 663 individuals and their families to access services, coordinate support and address current and future needs. The Disability Gateway is the organisation that manages the needs register for government in those assessments of if a vacancy becomes available or if an individual support package in the rounds where we disburse individual support packages, we work with the gateways. I should indicate - and I failed to do so before - that the gateways will be a really important part of the launch of Disability Care Australia. In fact, it is the model that the Productivity Commission said would work. We should all be very proud of our gateways. It is a small 'r' review of the gateways. It is nothing for anyone to be worried about. It is just a normal part of doing business and will only affirm the need for the gateways as part of the human services framework in Tasmania. I can indicate, Mr Gaffney, that the review will be completed in July.

Dr GOODWIN - I am not sure if this one has been asked about the number of new jobs that will be created with the trial.

Ms O'CONNOR - Launch.

Dr GOODWIN - Yes.

Ms O'CONNOR - We are not trialling it; we are serious about it.

Dr GOODWIN - No, the first bit of it.

Ms O'CONNOR - The launch.

Dr GOODWIN - It is not called a trial?

Ms O'CONNOR - No. It has been drummed into us over and over again, Dr Goodwin.

CHAIR - It was called a pilot at one stage.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is a launch because it is the start of the disability care scheme.

CHAIR - But it has a pilot or you would not be able to launch it.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am happy for Ms Bresnehan to answer this question. I would simply say that the disability service sector in Tasmania will undergo very significant change as a result of DisabilityCare Australia. We will see growth within the sector. It is impossible to quantify what that level of growth will be, but I do think Tasmania has a rare advantage in this space. I have always thought we could market ourselves as the care capital of Australia in disabilities and aged care.

There is some work that is to be undertaken with the sector and funds have been allocated from the commonwealth to do that work around sector development, but also national disability services is doing some work with service providers around their training and workforce needs and expectations. We will see growth, but I am not sure how much there will be. We just need to make sure that we have those appropriate quality and safety frameworks in place and that we are supporting staff for their ongoing training.

Ms BRESNEHAN - I think you have answered it now, minister. Basically, yes, there will be new jobs. It is not necessarily the state government's role to do that. DisabilityCare are leading the work around that. We have a committee which is consisting of DisabilityCare, TasCOSS, the NDS, and some sector people looking at what that might be, what training we need to put in place and what capacity we need to build in the system. It is definitely recognised that we need more people qualified, trained up and ready to go. There are working groups looking at that but it is not possible to quantify how many at this point.

Dr GOODWIN - Do you know in terms of the expected participants what the age breakdown is? We know what the range is, but do we know how many there are in each?

Ms BRESNEHAN - Between 15 years and 24 years? We can get it.

Mr DEAN - I will just ask a question because of the piece in the paper headed 'Disability scheme fails man 29.' Will this scheme leave an opportunity for further support to be given to people who fall outside those age groups - in other words, through the other services and moneys that are available in this area? Will it mean that or not?

Ms O'CONNOR - We have to work within the funding envelope that we have in disability services. There is the continued funding, the extra \$1.3 million, in this year's budget that will maintain individual support packages. The bulk of the new money that we have in disabilities has gone towards the NDIS launch. I know Mr Mollineaux and I have been out to have a cup of tea with him and his family. I understand his frustration around his specific circumstances. Mr Mollineaux is a highly intelligent man. I have not read that article in detail. I saw the news story on television at night, so I do not know how much of that story is fact. One of the errors that is within that article is that it states that 'no other person living with a disability who falls outside the 15 to 24 age cohort will have any access to DisabilityCare Australia until 1 July 2019'. That is not the case. I would like to reassure the committee that we are working now with the agency on a

transition staging process to introduce more and more clients who are not 15 to 24 years old into the scheme. That is why there are the extra funds between the launch and the establishment of the full scheme because they will go towards extra supports for those people as we move them into the scheme. We have done some work around some possible phase-in number scenarios to the full scheme. We believe that in 2016-17 we could bring in another 1 110 clients.

Mr DEAN - It would simply mean the extending of the age group. Is that what that would mean - giving you more clients?

Ms O'CONNOR - It would not be about extending the age group. What will happen is if someone is 15 years now and they are eligible for the scheme, they will just stay on the way through. If someone is 23 years now and they are eligible for the scheme those supports will continue with them even as they are 26, 27, 28 years of age.

Mr DEAN - That was my question on that. Those picked up now, once they have turned 25 years will not lose their support, then?

[3.45 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - That would be cruel and we certainly would not do that. Once someone enters DisabilityCare they are in the scheme. From 2016, from the end of the launch, other age groups will enter. It will have nothing to do with age and everything to do with the level of reasonable and necessary support. In 2016-17, we have some rough estimates that we will be able to phase in an extra 1 110 clients to DisabilityCare Australia. There is a process that will be happening over the course of the next five years that will ultimately see 10 587 people with disability as clients of DisabilityCare Australia.

Mr DEAN - Did we cover the number of those in the state that would fall within this category or could fall within this category?

Ms O'CONNOR - We currently deliver disability services to around 6 400 people. There is a level of unmet demand and a level of need that we are not able to meet currently within our funding allocation. We have a reasonable picture of unmet need and the clients within Tasmania. I am sure you know that there are people right now whose parents are caring for them and who have never accessed any level of government-funded services.

Mr DEAN - I know of a number who have never accessed help; they do not have any help at all.

Dr GOODWIN - The great fear for those parents is what happens when they are not around.

Ms O'CONNOR - We have used some Productivity Commission projections around the level of disability within the community to help us reach this projected number. It may be higher, it may be less, but whatever the number is, if they require support and are eligible, they will come under DisabilityCare Australia.

CHAIR - My question relates to the regional public meetings. Mr Gaffney talked about the one in his area; I saw an advertisement for the northern one. At those meetings do people indicate there that they want to be part of the scheme? You talked about self-assessment, so how are those 1 000 people chosen right now?

Ms O'CONNOR - How is that 15-24 age group chosen?

CHAIR - Yes, how are they chosen? How do get in the scheme other than go to these meetings and do some self-assessment and put your hand up and say, 'I believe I want to be a part of this'?

Ms O'CONNOR - The forums are about information-sharing with potential clients and their families and carers of Disability Care Australia. I will let Mrs Ganley talk about this shortly, but we have quite a good understanding of that cohort in the 15-24-year age group. We have written to 960 individuals and their families to let them know they are likely to be eligible for extra supports under DisabilityCare Australia. The commonwealth agency is driving most of that work around the regional forums and we are supporting in whatever way we can. I will ask Mrs Ganley to talk about it a bit more.

Mrs GANLEY - Initially, we have worked quite closely with our own information and particularly with the Department of Education's information in identifying people living with disability in the 15-24 year age range. Within our current programs right now we have 633 clients using our services in that age range. We have been working through a consent process of contacting those individuals individually to seek their consent to give their information to DisabilityCare Australia, which will then make the phone call and make an appointment for them to start coming in through their assessment and planning process.

One of the important messages in disability care is it cannot start on 1 July and everyone turn up on the same day. There is an agreed phasing approach between the state and the commonwealth on how people will phase in and disability care are working through that and we are working closely with them. Similarly, the Education department has been seeking consent from students known to them and providing that information directly to disability care as well. They are making that direct contact with individuals and on top of that there are the information sessions so if anyone has missed out they can then make direct contact with disability care. We are relatively confident, because of that age group, that between our service system and the services they are using and the education system, we have covered the majority of individuals.

CHAIR - And that total number is likely to be about 960 at the commencement date, but they will not all get started on their new plan from day one.

Mrs GANLEY - Yes.

CHAIR - It would almost be impossible to quantify what funds are going to be needed into the future? Like projecting right out to 2019 can be difficult.

Ms BRESNEHAN - It is very difficult to know what the total costs are because it is going to be done in stages. Disability care is setting up quite an administrative system and they have a whole room full of actuaries that will be putting in all the data. They have also described what they call reference packages so if this person with this sort of disability is likely to need these services, which is likely to cost this and when you are 15 it is going to cost you x. By the time they are 50 or 80 it is going to cost you yz. They have that kind of workings that they are developing so that during the trial and the launch they will be able to populate their actuary projections to get a more accurate cost. It is one of these things that need time to work through and in three or four years we will have a much more idea. It is based on what we know is the cost

of delivering services now with some degree of projection with what we know, but we will have real live accurate data as the trial and launch go through.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am sure this has all been covered but I would like to hear about accountability, how each person will need to account for all the money they get, annually I presume. I presume there will be audit processes in place to audit the whole scheme. Will there be KPIs that need to be met by the scheme, itself, rather than by individuals, and is there going to be an evaluation and at what point?

Ms O'CONNOR - I am going to defer this question to Ms Ganley but with a preliminary comment. There was a lot of discussion around the bill that established the NDIS launch and the full scheme and quite a lot of that discussion was around making sure that the legislation did not become punitive or onerous for people accessing support under Disability Care Australia and striking a balance, because we are talking about ultimately people who are highly vulnerable, potentially, for a number of reasons and also public funds as part of the insurance approach to provide supports for disabilities.

The commonwealth was very constructive about this; the first draft feels like a piece of Centrelink legislation. It was pretty tough and the commonwealth worked very constructively with the states around this. We, as a state, expressed a number of concerns about the tone of the bill so the tone of the bill has been toned down. There are layers of accountability within it, which I am going to ask Mrs Ganley to talk about.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am thinking not just of the people who are going to be on the scheme, because I am sure that that accountability bit, and as you say, we are about making conditions better for them not worse. I am thinking more at the other end, about the roll out and accountability, because we have heard about the problems with roll out of NBN and previously with insulation and we want to be careful about that, so I just want to be sure.

Ms O'CONNOR - Disability Care Australia has established a board and an advisory committee. I have in very recent days seen the final make up of the board and we have a Tasmanian representative, which I am not yet in a position to divulge. It is very much a skills-based board. It is about making sure that the DisabilityCare Australia is run appropriately and that there is accountability and transparency within its processes. The appointments to the board and the committee have all been agreed to by all the states, territories and the commonwealth. It was specifically to address some of those potential concerns.

Ms GANLEY - We are starting by using existing state-based safeguards and quality frameworks, but over the launch period there will be developed national frameworks based on what we do in each state. In terms of providers, which is often the question that is asked, there will be a rule about registering to be a provider. That is going through the consultation process at the moment. That is about what organisations need to do to be a registered provider to deliver services under DisabilityCare and in that rule, because unions have raised similar concerns and they will talk about subcontracting, because that has been part of the issue. If you get the funds and then you subcontract, there is a discussion about that should be treated to raise that safeguard.

Mrs TAYLOR - We hope we have learned from those previous experiences.

Ms GANLEY - The commonwealth has funded an evaluation and we are waiting to hear the announcement on who that is, because it is going to start now and work through the life of the

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launch on meeting its outcomes and impacts. There is a massive amount of data work being done and collected that will be reported nationally to the board on the outcomes that DisabilityCare is achieving. We have invested our funds and there is an agreement to report back to the states on how that is progressing.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am really pleased to hear that there will be, I presume, an independent board because the board members will be liable if it is not administered properly.

Ms O'CONNOR - Are they liable?

Mrs TAYLOR - They would have fiduciary duty as any other board would.

Ms O'CONNOR - I think they do have a fiduciary duty, but I am just not sure of the level. We have to check on that.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is part of the safeguard stuff.

Ms O'CONNOR - We should be prepared for the launch to reveal things that could be done better, potential flaws in the legislation and the framework. That is why it is a launch. We all need to be grown up about the fact that we are launching it so if there are mistakes to be made and lessons to be learned it should be before the full scheme rolls out in 2019.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am not being negative about this here, I am being positive.

Ms O'CONNOR - I know that, Mrs Taylor.

Mrs TAYLOR - I don't want to see it fail because some of the things that have happened in the past; things that ought to be done are not set in place beforehand.

Dr GOODWIN - Minister, I just wondered if it would be possible to get a breakdown of what was spent under the scheme this year and what is intended to be spent next year?

[4.00 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - We might take that one on notice for now. What I do have here is the expenditure by the three Tasmanian Health Organisations on equipment repairs, maintenance and support. THO south in the 2011-12 financial year spent \$720 000; THO north \$469 000; and THO north west \$252 000, but in the financial year to date in the south, \$591 000; the north \$162 000; and in the north-east \$247 000. The expenditure in the 2011-12 financial year on equipment repairs, maintenance and transport was \$1.48 million and in the year to date now it is so far \$920 557. In terms of the TasEquip budget which includes the IT on that form, it was the Tas Equip budget or the money that is currently spent on equipment repairs, maintenance. Because that is the equipment budget.

Dr GOODWIN - Yes.

MS BRESNEHAN - We have this project, we have a little bit of extra money they we are topping that up with but that is the core funding. The project funds - anything they have not spent on the project re-tipping to that source being used.

Dr GOODWIN - So the project is finished.

MS BRESNEHAN - We will finish it this year.

Dr GOODWIN - Okay, then you will have a bit of left over money from that, I see.

Ms O'CONNOR - I can indicate that I have here, in response to Dr Goodwin's question, the breakdown of family support services budget.

Mr GAFFNEY - I would like to discuss Gateway services about their approach to autism and children who exhibit autistic signs along the spectrum and I have heard that they are being advised that because there is no clear diagnosis of autism that some of those children are not being accepted as having a disability and needing some support and, clearly, those signs of a child's autism have happened by the time the child is two or three, as you well know so what I am going to ask is: what is the role of Gateway in autism, why are children with autism are not being accepted on the disability scheme, what relationship is there and is there any chance future assessment to do with your children having autism in Tasmania?

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you for your question, Mr Gaffney. I am aware of this issue and the frustration that has been expressed by a number of parents of children who are on the spectrum who have been declined services as part of the Gateway process and I can indicate that on 14 June, there will be a meeting between Autism Tasmania and the Gateway services so that there can be some real clarity here for both the families and the Gateways, because if you look at the Disability Services Act of 2011, the state act, it is clear that a person who is on the spectrum who has a sensory intellectual impairment who would be eligible for services under the act but it is about the level of need for those services at a particular time in your life. I think there may have been some misunderstandings on the part of the Gateways here and we are just trying to clarify that with the Gateways and working with Autism Tasmania to do that. But we have certainly heard the frustration of parents with children on the spectrum about their access to services that supports early intervention.

Mr GAFFNEY - I think early intervention is the key here and getting the correct diagnosis. Sometimes people may say that behaviour they are not very pleased about could be because of a certain autistic tendency. If you are meeting on 14 June, that would be good. If that meeting goes well, in favour of - there are quite a few children and families who are being stressed because they do not know to cope and deal with it. There would be the intention that that could be an area in which Disability Services plays a great role?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, but it would not be entirely accurate to say that children with autism are receiving no services. There are therapy services we fund the community sector to deliver for people between the ages of 0-18.

Mrs TAYLOR - Do you fund St Giles?

Ms O'CONNOR - We sure do. In the north and south of the state these services are provided by St Giles with the funding of therapy services including Children's Therapy South, \$3.5 million; the Seating and Equipment clinic, \$295 000; Children's Therapy North, \$2.8 million; and paediatric speech pathology, \$53 000. That is not autism-specific; they are therapy services for children with a range of physical or intellectual impairments. One of the challenges here is around what resources are available. While a person may be assessed as being eligible for a level of service, if there are not the resources to attach to that person, Gateway is in a quite difficult

position of determining or advising on the greatest level of need. That is where part of this tension is, particularly for families of children with autism. We want to make sure there is real clarity on both sides here and to work out if there is some problem of interpretation we can help to resolve.

Mr GAFFNEY - Who would have the responsibility of the people here for the Gateway organisation, other than yourself?

Ms O'CONNOR - That would be Ms Ganley.

Mrs TAYLOR - Is there a little bit of a disconnect, minister, between Gateway and advocacy groups?

Ms O'CONNOR - I would not want to say there was a disconnect necessarily. They perform two very different roles and are both vital for people living with a disability. We need to be sure the facts of the matter are understood on both sides and also a discussion around what resources are available currently to children who are on the spectrum and require a level of support and therapy.

Mrs TAYLOR - Since this is a matter of interest and has been raised, do you think after that meeting and when you have sorted it out, you might provide a briefing for us on how that is going?

Ms O'CONNOR - I am very happy to do that.

Dr GOODWIN - Minister, I wanted to raise a matter in the annual report of the Tasmanian Forensic Tribunal. The chair of the tribunal, just about every year, raises concerns around the detention of people with intellectual disabilities in the Wilfred Lopes Centre who have been involved in offending, and she has raised it again this year. She is concerned that there are some people with intellectual disabilities who are on supervision orders who have not received, in her view, adequate support from Disability Services when they are in the community. As a result, they have perhaps reoffended or not stuck within the terms of their supervision order and have ended up in Wilfred Lopes and cannot be released because there is not enough support for them in the community. She is flagging that as a significant concern of hers. I appreciate what you say about the high level of unmet need in the community, but I am wondering whether you are aware of the issues she has raised and whether the NDIS will help to address some of these ongoing concerns she has been raising in her reports?

Ms O'CONNOR - I have to admit upfront that I have not read that report in detail. It is certainly an issue I am aware around people with intellectual disability and acquired brain injury in the criminal justice system, and I know of individual cases where there has been very challenging behaviours from an individual. In fact, this person had supports attached to them, including housing support at one time, and spent a significant amount of time in the care of the minister responsible for Corrective Services. I will ask Ingrid to talk about that in a bit more detail because we have intensive support clients who receive a level of support, but as to the specific question I think it is better if Ms Ganley deals with that.

Ms GANLEY - We have an intensive support service program which is run through community sector organisations and we have some accommodation facilities in the south the north-west of the state. For clients exiting under supervision orders, particularly at Wilfred

Lopes, we look at supporting them within those facilities. There is tension sometimes around the fact that we are a voluntary service that supports individuals within their supervision orders, but we have no capacity to restrict people's liberty so it is about working quite closely with the treating professionals and mental health services. There is quite a wraparound approach.

In terms of moving into disability care, it is an area that has been flagged as one we need to work between different service systems with, because the clients themselves might be relatively high functioning in terms of their skills and levels of ability, but that makes them, at times, a risk to themselves and the community. We would acknowledge there is that tension between people exiting those service but in this state we look at our intensive support service space.

CHAIR - Minister, Ingrid just indicated that there was the support service or accommodation in the north-west and the south. Is there no requirement or identified need in the north?

Ms GANLEY - There is no dedicated physical facility but intensive support also provides community-based packages. In terms of the population, it was seen that the units in the north-west would cover the northern people at this stage.

CHAIR - Can I ask whereabouts in the north-west?

Ms GANLEY - They are in Devonport and Wynyard.

CHAIR - And that covers the north of the state?

Ms GANLEY - Yes.

CHAIR - It is a fairly big drive if you live on the east coast to Devonport or Wynyard. Anyway, I am sure if there is a need we will hear about it through our offices or your department, minister.

The committee suspended from 4.13 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

5.3 Housing services -

Mr DEAN - I want to go straight into the new legislation - I think it is in our place at the present time and yet to be dealt with - in relation to those tenants who will need to leave Housing Tasmania homes in due course where they have reached the threshold of \$60 000 of joint income into the home. You have indicated, minister, that between 100 and 200 clients or tenants would fit that category. I am not quite sure how you gauge this, whether you have to go through the tenants or taxation or where you go to to establish those reaching the \$60 000 threshold? How do you propose doing that?

Ms O'CONNOR - I will just make some broad overview statements about the amendments in the bill before your House. The purpose of these amendments is to make sure that our housing portfolio is allocated to those people who are in need of public housing. We know that there are a number of our tenants, and I will ask Mr White shortly to talk about what those numbers might be, who could afford either to rent privately or purchase a home through Home Share, Streets Ahead or on the open housing market.

The primary reason we decided to propose these amendments is that it is a source of frustration, certainly to me, to know that there are people who are currently residing in Housing Tasmania properties who earn an income that would make them otherwise ineligible for public housing. We have a number of market renters. Approximately 1 400 of our tenants currently pay market rent for their properties because their income has reached a level where they are able to do so. Some of those tenants who pay market rent don't tell us their income details because they are paying market rent, therefore we don't need to assess their income to determine what 25 per cent of that income might be for the purposes of our rental assessments.

Mr White may have more details of the number of tenants who may be affected by this change? Before I go to him, what I meant to say earlier was that while in the first draft of the bill we set an income threshold at \$66 000 and an asset threshold of \$35 000, on consultation with the sector we have removed those provisions from within the bill we are now going through a consultation process. We held our first roundtable probably three or four weeks ago now with sector representatives such as Shelter Tasmania, the Tenants Union, Centacare and Colony 47 and we discussed what they believed a suitable assets and income threshold would be. Since then we have written back to the sector with three proposals about a more sensitive assessment around householders' ongoing eligibility for public housing. It is not our intention to cast tenants into homelessness and we will always look at the individual circumstances of a household in determining their ongoing eligibility for public housing.

Mr DEAN - You may not be aware, minister, but I raised about five or six years ago that you should be going down that path. I raised it in the PAC and in this place.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, and you have certainly raised it with me in estimates in previous years. I could give you some credit for the idea and in fact I am quite happy to. It is a really important issue.

Mr WHITE - There are two areas at play here. Income is what people earn, as well as what rents they are paying. You have to be very careful about looking at market rent figures. For example, we have small one-bedroom properties in more remote areas such as Gagebrook or Rocherlea that by their nature have quite low market rents. As we speak, 1 463 of our tenants are paying market rent but around 250 of those are paying less than \$150 a week, which is associated with the smaller one-bedroom units. We have quite a number of households that are not declaring their income. The reason they tend not do that is probably for their own privacy reasons but also those people are charged market rent, so in a lot of cases they feel they don't need to declare it because if they did they'd probably be paying market rent anyway. In trying to understand the exact number of people affected by this, you would look at a number around 170-180, and of that there are around 54 households we already know that earn \$70 000 or more who have declared their incomes and approximately 126 households that pay more than \$250 a week in market rent. The number would sit somewhere in that region of 170-180 households potentially that are subject to the changes to the Residential Tenancy Act.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Dean, I am very happy to table for the committee the information we sent out to the sector last week with a number of proposed income thresholds and three particular options.

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Mr DEAN - Minister, could we have a breakdown of those on the lists waiting for Housing Tasmania accommodation? It is referred to in our documents but I could not find a breakdown into areas.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am happy to provide that information.

Mr DEAN - Is it two categories now or three?

Ms O'CONNOR - Four. I am pleased to let the committee know that we have reduced the public housing waiting list by around 13 per cent in recent years. As at the end of March 2013, there were 2 216 applicants on the public housing waiting list compared to 2 869 in the previous year, so that is a decrease of 653 applicants or 22.8 per cent. In the category 1 and exceptional needs category - these are people at high risk of homelessness or living in very unstable accommodation - there are a total of 162 applicants. In category 2, 821 applicants; category 3, 500 applicants; and category 4, 285 applicants for housing. In the suspended category with incomplete applications, there are 246 individuals or families who are on the list for public housing; these are individuals who have applied and from whom we are getting more information.

Very briefly, for the 10 years since 2003, the waiting list in 2003 was 3 028. It peaked in 2004 at 3 326 but since then, other than a little peak in 2009-10, we have reduced the public housing waiting list to 2 216. That is in a very large part due to the increase in the supply of social and affordable housing across a range of areas in the portfolio including the NRAS housing, the economic stimulus package for housing, the new homelessness facilities, the five new facilities we have built around the state - so there has been a very positive downward trend on the public housing waiting list. With that said, there are still 2 216 people wanting to access public housing which is part of the reason we have made the tenure changes proposed.

Mr DEAN - Do you have a breakdown according to area? I want to know what the north, south and north-west figures are.

Ms O'CONNOR - The breakdown of the waiting list?

Mr DEAN - All I need is a breakdown now; I can pick the rest up.

Ms O'CONNOR - The category 1 breakdown: 91 in the south; 44 in the north; 27 in the north-west. Category 2: 457 in the south; 204 in the north; 160 in the northwest. Category 3: 318 in the south; 105 in the north; 77 in the north-west. Category 4: 139 in the south; 62 in the north and 84 in the north-west.

Mr DEAN - I would like to go to a matter now raised with me by the Ravenswood Neighbourhood House. It relates to the issue of heating homes in Housing Tasmania. They are indicating that many of their complaints relate to this very issue of the affordability of heating for their homes. They have given me a report on it where they say they have approached the state government, the federal government and Housing Tasmania for the past year in regard to the issue, but nothing seems to be changing. They have said that they have held public meetings, conducted objective valid research to ensure that the findings had veracity, provided community education, undertaken case studies and reported on numbers of people who are needing Aurora hardship provisions. They have given me an example of a lady who has put in some ducting in her own home to try and duct the heating out of where she had a Pureheat heater into another room so that she can have her child comfortable. She has done that off her own bat. She has four

small children and one is eight weeks old. This lady gives an example to the Ravenswood Neighbourhood House of the Pureheat that she has, and I quote, 'I put \$60 in it on Thursday and by Saturday it was all gone'. I continually raise this. These are the people who really want affordable heating. They are the ones who are paying the most for their heating, over and above all of us sitting around this table. Pureheat heaters are obsolete. You can see the money churning over in them.

Is the department looking at getting rid of these heaters? I was told at one stage that once they went kaput, that would be the end of them. But now I am told they are fixing them up. I have to be careful what I say here. Anyway, quite a few heaters went kaput but I understand they are being fixed up now and that is a sad situation. So where are we with that, minister?

Ms O'CONNOR - I appreciate this question and the level of concern you have for your constituents. I cannot but agree with you completely about the Pureheat heaters. We no longer install them in Housing Tasmania properties for the very reason that they are an expensive form of heating for people who are on really very low incomes.

Mr DEAN - Particularly the older ones. The new ones might be good; I do not know, but the older ones are not.

[4.45 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - They are power-gobblers, which is why we have moved away from installing Pureheat heaters. Our heating policy, however, is that if the heater is serviceable, then we will service it until the end of its life before we install a heat pump, for example.

I am very aware of the issues around Ravenswood with heating and it is part of the reason that we are focusing some of our energy efficiency spend in Ravenswood, particularly around Pioneer Parade. I went up to Pioneer Parade probably around a year ago now and I was invited into a tenant's home to have a look at their Pureheat heater which had had a malfunction and then was repaired by the maintenance person. It was clearly not adequate to heat that whole home. Part of the way that we ameliorate this is to invest in energy efficiency. With the \$3.5 million that we spent last year we are focusing on those households that would most benefit from an energy efficiency upgrade. The funding for that partly came out of our maintenance budget and partly out of new moneys and \$2.5 million this year,. You can get the maximum benefit out of your Pureheat heater and save money if your house is thermally efficient.

I know this is a genuine issue, not just for people in Ravenswood but for tenants in other Housing Tasmania areas, which is why we have changed the heating policy so we no longer install heat pumps. In some areas we have flexibility now around the wood-heater policy because that was quite a hard-and-fast policy before. Under certain circumstances in certain areas we would allow people, for example, to install their own wood heater. It is very much the reason that we have been focusing the resources that we do have on energy efficiency upgrades to make sure that the homes people are in are retaining the heat that is produced. It is an ongoing project, particularly with Ravenswood.

I saw Jenny Gee a couple of weeks ago up at the Ravenswood forum. She is a fantastic representative of her community and of neighbourhood houses generally, and a very passionate Tasmanian. We did talk about this issue again. It is why we decided to allocate some of the energy efficiency moneys to Pioneer Parade particularly. Pioneer Parade, and I am sure you have been there, is built on something close to a bog. It is a very damp area and the homes were built

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30-odd years ago. They were not built with thermal efficiency in mind at all. We have to work with the stock that we have, but there are many more homes now within the public housing stock that are more thermally efficient and also have had heat pumps installed.

Mr DEAN - The next one I want to touch on, minister, is the maintenance contracts that you have in place for your homes. To explain the position here, I need to relate to an account that has been forwarded to a tenant leaving a Housing Tasmania home at Ravenswood and another one who left a home at Rocherlea. They received an invoice from Housing Tasmania to pay for certain items that were repaired. I just want to refer to one or two of the items: 'remove a coat hook in the bathroom' - the cost was \$26.02. What the maintenance repairer did there - and I have photographs of all these - was to unscrew four screws without even plugging the holes up. That cost this lady \$26.02. I have told her at this stage not to pay it and I am taking the matter further for her. Another one was: 'install a doorstopper in a bedroom' and that cost \$26.03; 'provide a toilet roll holder' - \$91.07; 'replace a dining room door' - \$364.28. You can buy an internal door for about \$90 just about anywhere. I have gone through a whole list of things here that are absolutely extortionate. Replace a handle on a clothesline: I have a photo here, it is not even handle, and they have welded a piece of metal on it and the cost was \$65.05. They are extortionate costs. Repairs to a laundry cupboard handle, \$20. It might have been an expensive handle perhaps. It just goes on and on and the prices are extortionate.

I am told that Housing Tasmania in the northern area is going to contract out to different people. Does Housing Tasmania, after these programs are put into place and these repairs are done, do they go in and check the work to make sure it has been properly and that the charges are reasonable? This is a Housing Tasmania invoice, so there is a copy in your system in Launceston, and the cost is absolutely extortionate. The pelmet replacement is a good one. The photographs here show that the pelmet replacement was probably in better condition before it was replaced. That one was repaired and charged for and it is still hanging off the wall. There is the handle for the clothesline. It is a metal piece welded on and it looks like it might have been broken off. There appears to be issues with the maintenance in some areas. Minister, do you inspect after the maintenance is carried out and are you looking at changing contracts in relation to these?

Ms O'CONNOR - Lake Maintenance has been performing duties for Housing Tasmania for the past five years and it is now a statewide contract. We audit about 20 per cent of the maintenance works in Housing Tasmania. The information that you have presented to the committee today is very interesting. I had a conversation with Jenny Gee when I last saw her about a particular tenant who felt that she was being charged for normal wear and tear rather than vacated maintenance charges. We are undertaking a review of at least one of those cases.

Ms GOSS - Jenny has sent all the information through to me, which will be reviewed by Housing in that individual case.

Ms O'CONNOR - We are looking into one specific case that Jenny Gee presented to me in our most recent meeting, but we have not had the results. For any tenant that you want to provide an immediate avenue for appeal, recommend that they contact the housing review committee so that committee can have a look at the circumstances of that vacated property or any maintenance charges that a tenant thinks are above and beyond what they should pay. The housing review committee undertakes and independent assessment of the circumstances.

Mr WHITE - The items that the member refers to are what we call schedule rates items, replacing clothes pegs and doors et cetera, they are all listed in the tender documents. When the

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prices are tendered for it is our responsibility to obtain the best value for money we can for the taxpayer. It is a bit difficult to compare someone buying a door from a hardware shop and installing yourself, when these people have to come in and install it. They factor into all those prices, attendance on the site. In some cases they turn up on some occasions and there is a no show et cetera and that margin is reflected in the general schedule of rates items. There are issues regarding the quality of door specified in those maintenance items as well. It is very easy to pick out items and suggest it is exorbitant, but those items were subject to a competitive tender process, as will the new maintenance items coming forth on 1 July.

Mr DEAN - I was going to show you the photograph I had. Is \$26.02 a reasonable cost for unscrewing four screws?

Mr WHITE - The quality of the work is a separate matter. We have more than 60 000 works orders a year, so I am sure you appreciate we cannot inspect all works and therefore we have an audit regime. There are penalties in our contract for contractors who are not meeting the expected standards under those audits.

Mr DEAN - The arson thing comes up again, minister. We have had quite a few again this year and I do not know whether it is dropping off, but I hope it is. I notice in your budget papers the turnaround time for vacant homes. People are telling me they have houses that have been vacant for a much longer period than the average and those homes are being targeted. What is the position there? Are there any new strategies in place and are change-around times improving?

Ms O'CONNOR - While every house that is subject to an arson attack is not only a cost to the taxpayer but it is one more home that one more family cannot live in for a time. There are some encouraging signs in the cost of arson to Housing and therefore to the taxpayers. For the financial year 2011-12, there were 58 claims for damage or destroyed by arson at a cost of \$2.4 million, which represented a 59 per cent reduction from the previous financial year when the cost of arson reached \$5.76 million. So far to date losses as at 31 March this year are \$2.421 million. There is a cost to Housing Tasmania and people on the waiting list but we have a number of strategies in place to try to deal with the problem and one is working very closely with Tasmania Police, the fire service and Crime Stoppers. We have the Officer Next Door program in Housing with 14 police officers residing in Housing Tasmania areas as part of our crime prevention strategy.

We fit smoke detectors to all Housing Tasmania properties. The old smoke detectors are being replaced with 10-year lithium batteries. All vacated properties are being fitted with two hard-wired photoelectric smoke alarms with the 10-year lithium battery backup. We fit remotely monitored security devices to vacant properties deemed to be at high risk. We have strong networks with community centres, parents groups, community health and mental health services. We meet regularly with the Tasmania Fire Service and Tasmania Police to determine if there are links between specific fires and to seek information about possible reductions in fires. We meet with Tasmania Police to plan proactive patrol and deterrence activities. We engage private security firms to patrol, occupy and/or monitor properties at extreme risk - for example, where police intelligence identifies a credible threat to the property. We exclude convicted arsonists from future tenancies in public housing properties. We offer a reward of up to \$10 000 to anyone who provides information that leads to the conviction of those responsible for burning down Housing Tasmania properties.

[5.00 p.m.]

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We are currently trialling a new fire-retardant coating that can be applied to the interior of a property at the time of internal painting. This coating will retard fire and prevent ignition of walls, roof and internal joinery for up to 60 minutes, which is sufficient time for smoke alarms to trigger and emergency services to respond. This is in the early stage of deployment and no properties are currently treated have yet been targeted by arsonists. I can indicate that 70 per cent of the arson attacks in the previous year were in occupied properties.

Mr DEAN - I should say too that Rick Faulkner does a great job in Launceston and has a great team of people.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes.

Mr DEAN - There is one other question I wanted to ask on the outstanding debt to Housing Tasmania. Is that increasing because of the economy and the way it is? Is there a comparison over the last, I guess, two years, three years to see whether it is increasing or not?

Ms O'CONNOR - I can indicate to the committee that Housing Tasmania has an excellent record in debt management and we work very hard within Housing Tasmania to ensure that these targets are maintained. When clients vacate Housing Tasmania properties they often leave a debt relating to unpaid rent or some rechargeable maintenance at the time of vacation. We pursue all debts vigorously. We use collection agencies where appropriate but some of these debts, for a range of reasons, can be difficult to pursue. Some clients may not tell us where they are moving to, and it would be hard to find them.

CHAIR - And the number is?

Ms O'CONNOR - In the 2011-12 financial year - these are the debts that are written-off in the financial year - \$801 801.

Mr DEAN - That is written-off, yes?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, and 2012-13 the debt is at \$798 000.

Mr DEAN - Is that written-off?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, and we do make a provision for doubtful debts of around \$802 000. We continue to pursue the debts until the cost becomes not worth it.

CHAIR - So that is the outstanding debt; not the written-off ones but the outstanding debt.

Ms O'CONNOR - We have the best debt collection on rent arrears in the nation and at 31 March this year we had a total of 2 590 debtors with a total dollar value of \$3.23 million. If we are writing-off in the vicinity of \$800 000 in debt, presumably that means that we are accruing \$2.4 million of money that is owed. The big cost in debt terms is maintenance costs from properties that are damaged when they are vacated and that is very close to \$3 million.

Ms BRESNEHAN - In terms of rent arrears it is only \$300 000 and that goes to the fact that we are very strong on rent arrears - it is 0.42 per cent.

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Mr DEAN - I take it that these accounts are pursued through MPES - the monthly penalty support unit?

Ms BRESNEHAN - Yes.

Mr DEAN - So they are past on. The debts that are written-off, do you write them off before they get to the MPES?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, usually when we have exhausted all options, then we may write a debt off.

Ms BRESNEHAN - We do not write off anything that is current, we pursue those. If we, after six to 12 months, cannot get it back we refer it to a collection agency and if after 12 months we cannot collect it from them, it is written off. We keep a record so if they come back we know they are coming back.

Mr DEAN - You referred to a collection agency, but my question was concerning the MPES, the government money penalty enforcement section - do you utilise that?

Ms O'CONNOR - The Tasmanian Collection Service.

Mr DEAN - So you are unable to use MPES.

Ms O'CONNOR - MPES is used more for unpaid fines, so we use a debt collection service.

Mr WHITE - We would use MPES where it goes through the courts - we can use it in those circumstances.

Mr DEAN - So it has to go through the courts before you can use it. So you use the Tasmanian Collection Service for the purpose of collecting your debts?

Ms BRESNEHAN - That is correct.

Mr GAFFNEY - Was it 4 per cent - about \$4 million?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, \$300 000 in rental debts.

Mr WHITE - Sorry, it is 0.4 per cent - this is our current arrears - as a percentage of our collectables.

Mr GAFFNEY - For the amount of people you are collecting from, for such a large figure, that is unbelievable. I think it is a very sound result - amazing.

Mr DEAN - I think it is the damage debt at the end which builds all that up, and that is where we have the several million dollars.

CHAIR - Which is \$3 million.

Dr GOODWIN - A question on damage. Do you have a figure in terms of the number of tenants responsible for that damage?

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Ms BRESNEHAN - It is 1 600 properties. People pay their rent and if they don't pay their rent they build up arrears. We manage that very tightly, which is where we are national best practice, and at the moment we only have \$300 000 against a rent bill of about \$70 million. So that is why it is fantastic. People do leave the properties and then an inspection is made. The majority of people are great, others have a little and then there are others who have caused a lot of damage. We know that currently across about 1 600 properties, there is \$2.9 million worth of vacated debt.

Dr GOODWIN - What sort of damage is it? Is it something they do when they leave or is it something that has not been discovered through their tenancy?

Ms O'CONNOR - Some of them will relate to domestic and family violence incidents. There can be a real challenge there because if a woman, for example, in a family has a victim of domestic and family violence and has had to leave that home and is living on very low income and is not the cause of that damage, then you don't want to unnecessarily punish that victim.

Ms BRESNEHAN - A lot of it can be people just leaving their rubbish. They don't mow the lawns, they leave rubbish, old furniture and we need to get someone in to clean and tidy and make it presentable again. There is a lot of that where people just do not care, 'I'm out of here'. It's everything.

Mr DEAN - I would like to ask a question on evictions and those who are on a list as being not suitable for Housing Tasmania. In other words, they have failed to pay debt et cetera, and there are some of those.

Ms O'CONNOR - As we have discussed in previous committee hearings, eviction is a course of last resort for Housing Tasmania because we do not want to be evicting people into homelessness. There are circumstances under which a person, because of their behaviours, is deemed not to be suitable to be living in a Housing Tasmania property or the property that they are in. It applies if the tenant seriously and repeatedly breaches their lease and defaults on arrangements - if they refuse, for example, to engage with support providers to help them sustain their tenancy or if it is in the interests of their neighbours. If a tenant takes reasonable steps to remedy breaches, such as entering into an arrangement to pay of arrears, eviction action will be stopped and this can occur right up to the time that the locks are changed.

For the last financial year 2011-12, a total of 50 Housing Tasmania tenants were evicted. In the current financial year to date, to 31 March this year, 23 tenants have been evicted. It is currently showing a downward trend but there is more of the financial year to go. Total evictions per financial year by reason were: in 2011-12, 14 tenants were evicted for anti-social behaviour; in 2012-13 to date four tenants have been evicted for that reason; rental arrears in 2011-12, 36 tenants were evicted because they failed to pay their rent and failed to enter into an agreement for how they would pay their rent and the arrears; in this year to date 19 tenants have been evicted as a result of rental arrears.

Mr DEAN - Which is not too bad given the number of tenants you have and it is a hard area.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is always a delicate balance.

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Dr GOODWIN - Minister, can I ask you to clarify that point? There was a matter going through the Supreme Court with the Tenants' Union. Would that still be impacting?

Mr WHITE - The matter you are referring to was one where the client was on a fixed-term lease and Housing Tasmania's decision was not to renew that lease. That is still subject to an appeal of the Supreme Court to the full bench. That is a different situation, I suppose, to what we find. It would be counted as an eviction for the purposes of our reporting.

Dr GOODWIN - Were there several people affected by that issue?

Mr WHITE - There are, I think, three cases pending. Essentially the case that was heard recently before the full bench is a test case from the Tenants' Union in relation to the approach we have taken. We will wait for the judgment on that in the next few months.

Ms O'CONNOR - Do you want a little bit more detail on these cases?

Dr GOODWIN - One of my constituents has been affected by it and that is why I am interested in its progress.

Ms O'CONNOR - One matter was heard in the Supreme Court on 3 September 2012. Justice Blow ruled on the matter and handed his decision in December 2012, dismissing the case. There are four matters adjourned in the Magistrates Court pending the outcome of the Supreme Court matter. The Tenants' Union has appealed Justice Blow's decision and this was heard by the full bench of the Supreme Court on 16 May this year. We are not likely to have a decision on that until August this year or later. While we cannot discuss the details of individual cases, particularly in a public forum, in each case we have argued that there have been serious and ongoing breaches of the lease agreement. We always try to make appropriate referrals in an attempt to support clients to meet their lease obligations. Some clients take up those opportunities and some do not. It is then up to the tenants as to whether they accept these supports or defy the breaches of lease.

[5.15 p.m.]

Ms BRESNEHAN - It is just to say that we work with these clients for a long time. There is a lot of correspondence, visits and interactions with support agencies. Then we will issue a letter saying, 'No, it will not be renewed'. In that standard letter at that point we did not explain for this reason. When the Tenants' Union raised that with us, we began to be a lot more explicit in our final letter. A part of the way it has been presented is, 'I got this letter and I don't even know why', which is not necessarily an accurate portrayal of what has been happening. That is part of the matter that is being discussed. Our practice has changed considerably; we now write a much more extensive letter and dot-point all the things we have done leading up to that decision.

Ms O'CONNOR - That was after consultation with the Tenants' Union.

CHAIR - Minister, while you have your book of figures out, can you tell me how the commonwealth debt is going, and the interest that is being accrued?

Ms O'CONNOR - We will well and truly be accessing our seniors cards by the time the debt to the commonwealth has been paid off. This relates to the period up to 1989 when the funding for Housing to the states and territories was made in the form of repayable loans, which I would argue was a flawed system from the beginning. The total debt outstanding is currently at

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\$209.8 million. But on 30 June this year, once we make our repayment, it will only be \$202.8 million. In the previous financial year, I am sorry to inform the committee, the repayment was \$16.3 million; in the current financial year, 2013-14, the amount is \$16.1 million, which is \$7.1 million in principal repayments and \$9 million in interest costs. As I advised the committee last year, on the current repayment schedule the debt will not be fully retired until 2042. This is an item of significant budgetary concern as the annual repayments for 2013-14 will consume more than half the total Australian Government funding to the Tasmanian government of \$30.3 million under the National Affordable Housing Agreement, which is the primary source of funding we have in this area. I know most Australian jurisdictions also have a commonwealth-state housing debt. I believe Victoria has paid its off and some other states have absorbed the debt into the consolidated fund, so it becomes part of state debt rather than a debt that is carried within the Housing portfolio.

CHAIR - Minister, have you tried to get the Treasurer to take it on?

Ms O'CONNOR - I have tried a number of strategies. I have been to Canberra to talk to the former Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek, about it. I went to Canberra with the Premier to talk to the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, about it and each time I was met with the same reception, which is, 'You have a debt and you are expected to pay it, as are other states and territories that also have a housing debt. We cannot give Tasmania any special treatment here because then other states and territories will rightly cry foul'.

Mr DEAN - Is there interest accruing?

Mr WHITE - There is interest on the debt. It is approximately 4 per cent per annum.

Ms O'CONNOR - The interest figure for the current financial year is \$7.1 million in principal repayment and \$9 million in interest. The interest bill declines year on year but next year we will be paying \$8.7 million in interest, the year after \$8.3 million, and it will not be until 2042 that our interest bill will be \$59 000.

Mr DEAN - That is sad, isn't it?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is; it is an albatross around the neck of Housing in Tasmania. It restricts our capacity to increase the supply of social and affordable housing. In terms of our payments on the principal between now and 2042, we will pay the commonwealth \$202.8 million and the interest paid in that period will be \$122 million.

CHAIR - It wouldn't be so bad if they just took the owing amount and didn't expect the interest on it. They're greedy and mean; that's about the long and the short of it.

Mrs TAYLOR - We took the loan.

CHAIR - It was a poor deal. Minister, the public housing wait list is the lowest it has been over 10 years but the average wait time has increased from 39.4 weeks to 45.6. You have a target for 2012-13 and 2013-14 of 41.5 weeks. Are you going to meet those targets?

Ms O'CONNOR - We always aim to meet our targets.

CHAIR - It is six weeks out.

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Ms O'CONNOR - The average time in the previous financial year that people had to wait to be housed across the entire list of four categories was 45.6 weeks. The current year-to-date figure show applicants are waiting on average 38.2 weeks to be housed. That is an average, so there will be some applicants on the category 1 list who are housed quite quickly and other applicants on the category 2 list who will be waiting that bit longer. If you are on the category 4 list you could be waiting years.

CHAIR - What impact will the disability care launch have on those wait lists? Is that something you have been able to assess or looked at assessing?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, we haven't assessed it at this point. There is no provision for capital expenditure within the disability care framework, which is unfortunate, but that said, we're moving as we can within the resources we have to increase the supply of supported accommodation, which is one of the reasons we are investing in Trinity Hill. It is also the reason that when we do new builds in housing we make sure they are built to a universal accessible design for people with mobility issues. We have a supported accommodation waiting list in disabilities which is too long and we are continually working to try to bring that down.

Mrs TAYLOR - You might have already answered this, I don't know. The housing fund in 2007-08 - that's not the commonwealth money we're talking about, is it?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, it's part of the \$60 million that was allocated during the Lennon government.

Mrs TAYLOR - The expectation then was that it would provide how many new houses?

Ms O'CONNOR - From a range of funding sources we have increased the supply by around 1 500 homes since January 2009.

Mrs TAYLOR - How many have we built?

Ms O'CONNOR - We have built 1 500 new homes, not entirely out of the housing fund, since January 2009, but that is from a range of funding sources. Some of that is housing fund money, some of it comes through the national rental affordability scheme, other is economic stimulus package moneys and the spare change we get from funds that we secure from the commonwealth. I am very happy to table for the committee details of the new builds across the state in the three regions. As at 31 March this year we had built 1 534 new homes from a range of funding sources since January 2009. It is a very significant investment in increasing the supply of social and affordable housing. Before Mr White became the Director of Housing he ran the Housing Innovations Unit and in fact has overseen the capital works spend and build over the past three years and is in a much better position to answer this question than I.

Mrs TAYLOR - He had a job in the department before he was at the Housing Innovations Unit.

Mr WHITE - I did have a job before then.

Mrs TAYLOR - What were you before that?

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Mr WHITE - I was in charge of asset management for Housing Tasmania. We had a total of approximately 900 dwellings under the housing fund. Of that 900, that includes the housing fund has been used to support NRAS in the state, so \$20 million-odd of the \$60 million was set aside to support the NRAS programs in the state.

Mrs TAYLOR - So it kind of changed as it went along, did it, that \$60 million that was supposed to build 1 500 new homes?

Mr WHITE - I think you are confused between the figures. The \$60 million was intended to be for around 900 dwellings, of which 200 were funded directly by the housing fund and included supported accommodation facilities, the Brisbane Street units in Hobart, some of the Moonah project at Hopkins Street as well, and Bayview Lodge at Rosny, so there was direct funding there for capital. Around 700 properties were supported under NRAS and at the moment the last figures we had for NRAS was approximately 500 dwellings and in total there are a further almost 1 000 to be delivered under NRAS. However that figure includes 770 delivered by the University of Tasmania, so our support is not coming out of the housing fund for that. In essence, the housing fund will contribute to approximately 1 000 dwellings.

Mrs TAYLOR - It is lovely to hear the figures coming down, but we want them to be coming down because we are able to build more houses rather than other unexplained reasons. Some people on category 4, particularly because of the rental situation, or because of house prices at the minute, might come off the waiting list and buy a house, which then makes the figures look better.

Ms O'CONNOR - Any of our prospective tenants we can assist in home ownership we are very happy for and it is part of the proposed changes to tenure. We have definitely built 1 534 new affordable homes in the past four years and that has had an impact on the waiting list, as has an easing of the pressures in the private rental market as well and the decline in interest rates.

Mr FINCH - Minister, at a previous budget estimates committee you made the offer that if we chose we could go straight to your officers rather than come through your office to deal with issues with housing.

Ms O'CONNOR - Straight to Housing Tas officers. Has that worked?

Mr FINCH - Yes, that has been fantastic.

Mr DEAN - Absolutely. I applaud you for that decision because your office would be inundated if that wasn't the case. Rick Faulkner at Launceston is an absolute gem to work with.

Ms O'CONNOR - That's great.

Mr FINCH - It's made it much easier.

CHAIR - You sent us a letter, minister.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, I remember that; I'm just really pleased to hear it's functional.

CHAIR - It works.

[5.30 p.m.]

Dr GOODWIN - I want to make a comment about the terrific service from Housing Tasmania. I have had several constituents with quite significant issues and I certainly appreciate the assistance given to my office and me.

Mr DEAN - I have one question in relation to water and water use. Does Housing Tasmania pick up the water use?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes.

Mr DEAN - I thought it was. Why, because there is no incentive for tenants to be frugal with their water use?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is a very good question, Mr Dean, and you are correct that Housing Tasmania pays both the fixed and variable costs of water for public housing tenants. One of the challenges for us in the portfolio is that we have been talking to the water corporations about disaggregating the bill that Housing Tasmania pays so we could pay the fixed charges as a landlord but the tenants may be able to pay the variable charges, but that has proven very difficult to negotiate with the water corporations. If we want to be sure if we make a policy change in this area that tenants are paying for the water they use, not some averaged-out number we allocate per household, we would need to be able to disaggregate those bills.

Mr DEAN - So you do average out the cost?

Ms O'CONNOR - No, we don't, we provide a very significant subsidy to Housing Tasmania tenants in order to pay for their water services. The ongoing additional cost to Housing Tasmania we project will amount to approximately \$6 million over the financial years to 2014-15. I remind the committee that in 2009, in the heat of an election campaign, the then Premier reassured Housing Tasmania tenants they would not be charged for their water and sewerage rates. I understand why he did that; we are talking about people on very low incomes, but there are also people in the private rental market on very low incomes who are paying for their water consumption. At this stage we do not propose to charge our tenants for water and sewerage and we wouldn't be able to do so until we could disaggregate the bill we receive from the water and sewerage corporations.

Mr WHITE - Minister, I probably should clarify that. Where we have multiple units and only one meter we are unable to separate the water charge. For individual dwellings we have separate water charges shown on our billing, but until we install individual meters for each unit, which is a cost to us and not the water authorities, we can't charge tenants for usage. In a lot of our unit complexes there are not individual meters.

Mr DEAN - But the individual meters are on the other homes, aren't they?

Mr WHITE - They are connected to single dwellings and some unit complexes have individual meters, but most don't.

Grants and subsidies -

CHAIR - Minister, could I have a breakdown of the \$37.28 million on page 5.30, table 5.10.

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Mr REYNOLDS - This one is pretty straightforward. The grants and subsidies of \$37.2 million is the Aurora CSO payment.

CHAIR - Is that on top of the \$4.4 million already paid to Aurora to assist with electricity?

Ms O'CONNOR - Is that the heating allowance?

Mr REYNOLDS - I'm not sure if it is. Is that what you're referring to?

CHAIR - My understanding is that Aurora already get \$4.4 million. Is it \$37.28 million plus that \$4.4 million? That is what I am looking to clarify.

Ms O'CONNOR - While we are looking for that, just for the committee's information, Tasmania has one of the most extensive electricity concessions systems in the country and that is in significant part to do with the fact that we have one of the highest levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. Around 81 200 Tasmanian pensioners and healthcare cardholders now receive \$451 off their electricity bills each year, the largest concession provided by any government in Australia. In 2007 the government increased the concessions by 70 per cent and they are indexed annually for the impact of inflation. We have permanently linked indexation of electricity concessions to electricity price rises, approved by the Economic Regulator, so no matter what the size of the annual percentage increase, the concession would be increased by the same percentage to protect low-income Tasmanians.

I reiterate what we have been trying to do in the area of energy efficiency because, to my mind, it is ultimately a much better long-term investment in a household to make sure that their home is more thermally efficient. What we found through the Power Savings for Tenants program is that tenants are saving on average \$300 a year on the electricity bill, having had an electricity upgrade.

Mr REYNOLDS - Regarding the separate heating allowance, the numbers I have in front of me say that it is \$450 000 that would be paid in 2013-14. I am not quite sure about the \$4.4 million you refer to.

CHAIR - Is the \$450 000 included in the \$37.28 million?

Mr REYNOLDS - No, that is different.

CHAIR - That is a different pool of funds.

Mr REYNOLDS - The \$37.28 million is purely for the CSO Aurora payment for pensioner concessions as described on page 5.32 of the budget papers.

CHAIR - So there is not extra \$4.4 million paid to Aurora?

Mr REYNOLDS - Not that I am aware of.

Capital investment program -

Ms O'CONNOR - The 2013-14 capital program for Housing Tasmania totals \$29.8 million, which is broken down into Church Street youth accommodation, a new project in the housing

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capital investment fund of \$3.8 million; and the Neighbourhood House program, \$2 million; the total capital works expenditure of \$22.6 million; and the non-housing works, which is a commonwealth state debt, \$7.1 million. The big spends are the \$10.4 million for the construction of Trinity Hill, which will make a significant difference to the lives of young Tasmanians and young Tasmanians living with a disability. One project that I am particularly proud of is our refurbishment of Stainforth Court.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is not in there, is it?

Ms O'CONNOR - It is not a specific line item.

Mrs TAYLOR - You have another housing program bit that talks about Stainforth Court emergency, Huntingfield, Somerset land, Watchorn Street and so forth. That is not in that amount, those four major projects you just said?

Ms O'CONNOR - That is in new projects, the second line item.

CHAIR - This is capital investment program.

Ms O'CONNOR - That is out of existing funds that we have squirreled away and this allocation was to address a chronic need for refurbishment and rejuvenation of Stainforth Court; so work is underway at Stainforth. I visited the building probably about six weeks ago now and to say that it needed a refurbishment is a gross understatement. A number of these units do not look as if they have had any work done to them since the building was made in the late fifties. There will be a need to remove some asbestos or deal with it at Stainforth Court. That will add to the cost of the refurbishment. It is a great project. The construction company is Hutchinson Builders and they will be undertaking that refurbishment block by block. The place will look and feel completely different by the time it is finished. These units will be warm, comfortable, energy-efficient and the grounds will all be remade. By the time the project is completed in around March next year, we will be able to move 85 new households into Stainforth Court and create a very different community to what was there before.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is the issue, really, isn't it? I am aware that you would be saying that it looked as though those units had no attention. In fact they had had a lot of the worst possible kind of attention.

Dr GOODWIN - It has had a bit of a chequered history, hasn't it?

Mrs TAYLOR - Absolutely. The big problem with Stainforth Court has been its reputation as much as anything, and that is really hard to change.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is hard to change. It was, in some ways, a very unfair reputation for a lot of the people who lived at Stainforth Court. I have been down there two or three times when it was full- tenanted for a cup of tea or a barbecue. There were many tenants who loved living in Stainforth Court.

Dr GOODWIN - It's a great location.

Ms O'CONNOR - It was a part of a strong little community.

Mrs TAYLOR - But isolated.

Ms O'CONNOR - You will find in any concentration of humanity that there is the odd - what my mother used to call - bad egg who makes life difficult for the other tenants and was part of what contributed to Stainforth Court's reputation. We will be very careful about the tenant picks this time. We want to create a community where people are happy and proud to live. Housing choices will manage the tenancies in Stainforth Court when it reopens probably in March or April next year.

Mrs TAYLOR - And you will use some landscaping as that is a big part of the problem. It has just been sitting there as buildings without an environment really.

Ms O'CONNOR - Landscaping is a part of the tender process; I can advise you of that. There will be security upgrades to Stainforth Court and we are very seriously considering a new name for the complex.

Mr DEAN - I was going to ask you about a name change.

Ms O'CONNOR - One of the names that has been put forward is the Queen's Walk redevelopment because one of the streets that intersects with Stainforth Court is Queen's Walk. I have a very strong view that it needs a name change along with its facelift.

Mrs TAYLOR - You should do that sooner rather than later, perhaps, and start calling it that now.

[5.45 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, I agree. It is already being referred to by the builders and the architects as The Queen's Walk redevelopment. I am not sure if we will go with that name, but at the moment it seems to fit it quite comfortably. The building, which was built in a time when government had a construction arm, is very sound and definitely worth investing in to extend its life potentially for another 40 or 50 years.

Dr GOODWIN - What is the total spend on that, minister?

Ms O'CONNOR - The tender that was awarded a few months ago now is for a \$5 million spend at Stainforth Court. Hutchinsons Builders will work within that allocation.

Mr WHITE - As you alluded, the asbestos removal was greater than was in the report - a lot of the floor tiles et cetera. They have been removed now so there are some variations in the contract around that. We are also putting in 10 units on the ground floors that are to the platinum standard of liveable design, suitable for disabled clients. Again, there is a variation there in the costs. There were some additional items we have put in over budget - for example, we are replacing all the windows with double-glazed windows now rather than the steel frame so there is greater energy efficiency and they have given it a new look. The budget overall now will be around \$7.5 million.,

Dr GOODWIN - I did wonder; it sounded like it was going to be an absolute bargain to have all that done. The outside painting, et cetera, is that happening?

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Ms O'CONNOR - That will certainly be part of the works that are undertaken. We have had some preliminary drawings done by Tim Penny Architects which show a very sophisticated and muted colour scheme for the complex. We will be getting rid of the mission brown paint.

CHAIR - Not purple, minister?

Ms O'CONNOR - I said green - emerald green, no less! We may go for a nice buttery cream or something like that.

Dr GOODWIN - In terms of the tenants who moved out of Stainforth Court, where are they?

Ms O'CONNOR - It was a process of relocating tenants that we undertook over a few months. Mr White may have more detail shortly. We had Brisbane Street that had come on line, which is 35 units right in the heart of the city with 7½ star energy efficiency as standard. A number of Stainforth tenants went into there. All tenants were relocated and, as I understand it, are quite comfortable in their new homes.

Mr WHITE - They were all relocated into Housing Tasmania properties. In most cases it was better accommodation than they had left. That was achieved before Easter and took about five months to do. We had around 60 tenants we had to relocate. We achieved that, which is a great effort of the southern team.

Dr GOODWIN - Is it likely they will all stay where they are now?

Mr WHITE - Yes, we expect so. Some of them may wish to move back and that is a possibility if they wish to, but they have been moved on the premise they were moving into better accommodation. We expect a lot of them would not want to move, so they are free to stay where they are.

Mr DEAN - In relation to Trinity Hill youth accommodation, there is \$3.4 million for capital works. Can you please provide details of the amounts of funding that will be made available for the ongoing running costs of this much-welcomed project and assurance there will be adequate dollars for tenancy support services, training and management costs?

Ms O'CONNOR - I can give you an assurance there will be adequate funds for those supports.

Mr DEAN - And the ongoing maintenance?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, it will be a Housing Tasmania complex. We purchased the land from the Department of Education towards the end of last year for \$2.8 million. The model is very much like the Thyne House model in Launceston. Have you been to visit that, Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - I have, yes, but I have not gone right through it. I need to do that. This is the one in York Street?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes. It is an outstanding example of what you can do in supported accommodation. Supports there are run by Anglicare Tasmania. It is well worth a visit because when you talk to the tenants, and they are all young people, you can see that having that secure accommodation with the supports there and being part of a community has transformed these

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young people's lives. We have some fantastic statistics somewhere, that are no longer fully in my mind anymore, that there are very significant jumps in those young people's reconnection with families, their access to training and education and employment opportunities. They are the outcomes from Thyne House that we want to replicate at Trinity Hill.

Mr DEAN - It is an important project.

Dr GOODWIN - What age will the young people be?

Mr WHITE - They'll be from 16 to 25.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am delighted to hear about Church Street. It has been very quick in purchasing and planning. I presume you do not yet know who will run the complex or have designs for the project or architects and builders, but by the end of the financial year after next it will be finished, so that is really good. I do not know whether you want to comment on that at all, minister, but Mr White and I were talking during the break about Brent Street which has been rather the opposite, having owned it now for some years.

Ms O'CONNOR - We would love to see more movement on Brent Street.

Mrs TAYLOR - How have you been able to do this one so quickly and not the other?

Ms O'CONNOR - The opportunity came up through the Department of Education which wanted to divest the property -

Mrs TAYLOR - As did Brent Street.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, but this is a specific-purpose project. As opposed to Brent Street, which is to increase the supply of social and affordable housing in a mixed development, Trinity Hill is very much about filling what has been a significant gap in the south of the state in terms of providing supported accommodation to young people. It is a gap that was identified by Shelter Tasmania and a number of other support organisations in the community. When Church Street became available we jumped at it because of its proximity to Elizabeth College, to the heart of the city and to a whole range of opportunities and support services.

We have engaged an architect for Trinity Hill. We are working with some local residents and the Lambert School and I have written to Mr Tony Crehan about some of their concerns around how the property will be managed once it is constructed. We are working closely with those concerned residents who raised a number of issues which the Housing Innovations Unit is engaging with those residents on and we have cited the example of Thyne House as a very positive development where you can achieve outstanding outcomes for young people.

The short answer to your questions is that there is a yawning need in the south of the state to provide more accommodation for young people who have huge challenges securing affordable accommodation and enormous barriers to private rental. Safety is an issue, the level of support that is wrapped around particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds is a real issue, so we are proceeding with Trinity Hill in a timely but relatively speedy manner. We have to go through the planning process so it is all part of the work that is being undertaken now, but it is a great project.

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Mrs TAYLOR - Tell me good news about Brent Street.

Ms O'CONNOR - I can advise the member for Elwick that we now have a preferred tenderer for Brent Street and we are working through the contract details now and expect to make an announcement in the not-too-distant future.

Mrs TAYLOR - Why wouldn't that be on your housing program, or is it there somewhere but not specifically identified?

Mr WHITE - The reason is, in terms of the budget, that there is no funding going into that project from Housing Tasmania. The contribution is the land. We are putting in the land for development and the proposal we are looking at will deliver a mix of affordable and social housing and affordable home ownership through the HomeShare scheme. The accommodation would be owned by a not-for-profit housing provider. There will be a private investor involved as well doing the subdivision and development and people will be able to buy homes through the HomeShare scheme as part of it, as well as people buying private homes in response to demand from the market.

Ms O'CONNOR - Not unlike our Danina Street, Chigwell development.

Dr GOODWIN - Before we leave Church Street, it mentions a training facility and I wondered what that will be.

Ms O'CONNOR - The Trinity Hill site historically has been a school or education centre; when it wasn't a school it was an Adult Education site. The plan is to make a dedicated planning facility on site to support those young people's prospects for the future. There are heritage issues around a number of the buildings there so we will have to work with them, and that is part of the reason we had to start early and get on the case. Mr White, did you want to talk a bit more about what is planned in terms of how we deliver those educational services and who might deliver them?

Mr WHITE - What I can say is we are in the middle of an expression of interest process to select providers for the site. As part of that we have asked them about what they would do around use of the training-type facilities on the site and obviously the use of that will be subject to community consultation and for approvals as well in terms of whether people can come off site for training or whether it will be only exclusively for residents et cetera. It is not intended that people living there will only get their training, if you like, on site. Some of them would attend Hobart College, others would attend TAFE, university potentially, and other programs as well.

In terms of specifically how it will be used, we really cannot give you much more than to say we are looking at that, but the providers who have submitted interest have talked to registered training organisations and in some cases they are part of consortia related to this so we expect there will opportunities for various learning development activities to happen on site and, ultimately the scale and nature of that will depend both on our consultation as well as the approval process through council.

Mrs TAYLOR - How many of the buildings on site will be demolished? What will be left and how much will be new?

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Mr WHITE - At this stage it is too early to say. Most likely the building that would be demolished will be what is known as the CSIRO building which is the 1970s concrete block building adjacent to Lambert School. As to the other two substantial buildings on the site, one is heritage listed and the other one was renovated as office space about 10 or 12 years ago, and we intend to retain those for communal spaces and learning or gymnasium or whatever the various uses would be. The only other building on the site is a Colorbond garage area which could be very suitable for people doing up their cars and those sorts of activities. I think there is a bit of a shed which may be demolished but it is not of any great significance.

The plan is to re-use the bulk of the buildings on site. Certainly one of the benefits is that it is nearly 8 000 square metres of land, which gives us a great capacity to incorporate open spaces, other training, parking and all those things that we require in order to provide the full service, as opposed to other sites in the inner city that might be 2 000 square metres, for example.

[6.00 p.m.]

Mrs TAYLOR - The accommodation will all be new build?

Ms WHITE - Correct. At this stage, we are looking at accommodation being on the Elizabeth Street frontage on three to four levels as well as accommodation towards the Church Street side, which would most likely be single level accommodation because that will be targeted more at clients through NDIS and with a disability who can reside on the site as well. The intention at this stage is for 46 units but that will be subject to all approvals being granted.

Mrs TAYLOR - It is a very steep hill from Church Street down to Elizabeth. I know it is only a block but building on the Elizabeth Street side is not a problem if you going to go to Elizabeth College. Church Street, whether you go either side, Warwick or Patrick is very steep in both directions. It is right on the crest.

Mr WHITE - We can link it through lifts et cetera there and the Elizabeth Street frontage, even being three or four levels, the height -

Mrs TAYLOR - I am thinking of the people who are going to be in single units on Church Street. If they are people with disabilities, it is going to be a great wheelchair ride down the hill.

Ms WHITE - They are not necessarily people with mobility issues when they have a disability.

Mrs TAYLOR - Whoever the manager is will keep that in mind, I presume.

Ms O'CONNOR - Might I take this opportunity, Madam Chair, to table information I said I would provide earlier, which is around the DisabilityCare Australia age of cohort, the number of individuals who fit within each age. I am not sure who asked that question.

CHAIR - A couple of questions in relation to housing fund, minister. The continuation of support for the national rental affordability scheme, \$900 000, is that going to continue?

Ms O'CONNOR - That is correct and it is part of an ongoing contribution that we have made to NRAS over a number of years. It is \$900 000 in this financial year in this budget. We aim to deliver as many as 2000 units by June 2016. There are two new components of NRAS, round 5, that will deliver up to 600 dwellings, which we are working through now.

CHAIR - In relation to the acquisition of land in the north-west for a development of affordable housing, you are trying to pick up surplus land from, for instance, the Department of Education or where ever there is surplus land. Is that one that you had to buy outright from a private owner or is that one that belonged to the education department?

Mr WHITE - That site has not been identified yet but we are looking in the Devonport area.

CHAIR - Will it be a private?

Ms WHITE - Most likely. We are not aware of any surplus education properties, for example.

CHAIR - If there had been, you would have been all over them?

Mr WHITE - Potentially, it depends on location. We are looking at some specific uses there; it is just a matter of finding the right land.

CHAIR - That is in the Devonport area.

Ms WHITE - That is what we are looking at, yes.

CHAIR - Has a need been identified and that is why the feelers are out to look for appropriate land?

Ms O'CONNOR - There is and Mr Gaffney, I am sure, would concur that there is a need on the north-west coast for more social and affordable housing, more aged care housing and more housing for people living with a disability.

Mr DEAN - Common Ground, cannot fit that into it, can they?

Ms O'CONNOR - Common Ground services.

Mr DEAN - Has there been cost effective evaluations of the Common Ground model to date and if not, why is this the case? Can you provide information as to the cost of this model? This is your area, isn't it?

Ms O'CONNOR - Common Ground does fit within my area of portfolio responsibility.

Mr DEAN - How does Common Ground compare to other accommodation and support models currently funded by government in Tasmania? Didn't we hear on a daily basis from Common Ground services of the lack of affordable accommodation? Why do Common Ground still have vacancies and why are services reporting that those in need are being turned away?

Ms O'CONNOR - The Common Ground model, which was launched in Tasmania in 2008-09 has seen the delivery of the two facilities in Hobart. There are a total of 97 units. One is in Campbell Street and the other is in Liverpool-Goulburn Street. At last count there were 83 tenants in the Common Ground facilities. There was a body of work that was undertaken by the audit office assessing whether Tasmania is effectively and efficiently meeting its obligation under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and whether the agreement is making a

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difference for homeless people in Tasmania. The Common Ground facility is funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and it was within the scope of this assessment undertaken by the Auditor-General. Mr Blake found:

There is persuasive internal evidence that the supported accommodation facilities initiatives have made a significant difference to the homeless people involved with the programs and that the cost associated with implementing the programs were reasonable.

That did include Common Ground within the scope. A recommendation was made by the Auditor-General for a longitudinal study to provide objective data on the long-term outcomes for those clients. We have engaged the University of Tasmania to conduct a study of all services funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, including Common Ground. The university has started its work and I understand it will be completed later this year.

In terms of the cost per bed of this model, the average cost for a supported accommodation facility client was around \$75 a day and it did compare well with other funded models. That is not the cost that is specific to Common Ground, it is across the supported accommodation facilities.

Common Ground is a relatively new model and it is certainly new in Tasmania. It has a number of different elements to it. For example, if you went to Bayview Lodge on the eastern shore, which is supported accommodation facility that is managed by Anglicare, the tenants there are people who have been at very high risk of homelessness or they have been homeless. The Common Ground model is the next model. You have tenants who are very high risk or are rough sleepers living in the one community with people who can afford to pay a rental, people who are employed and are low to medium income earners.

We receive regular reports from Common Ground on their tenancy occupation. I have raised my concerns with Common Ground on a number of occasions about how long it has taken to fully tenant those two facilities, which were built at a combined cost of \$27 million. There is a very clear need for more accommodation facilities for people who are homeless or rough sleepers. I will be frank with you; I have been frustrated from time-to-time by how long it is taking Common Ground to fully tenant those units. There are still people who are sleeping rough in and around Hobart. The weather is about to become colder and there are still empty units within the Common Ground facility.

Mr DEAN - That is the concern of the people asking me to ask this question. People are being turned away who need it but there are vacancies there.

Ms O'CONNOR - I have had these frustrations and concerns expressed to me by sector representatives over a number of months now and I empathise with those concerns. Common Ground has an independent board. They run their own operations and undertake their own assessment processes. The state and commonwealth governments contributed very significantly to the construction of those facilities and we fund the supports -

CHAIR - Why are they not accountable, then, minister?

Ms O'CONNOR - Ultimately they are accountable. Common Ground has to present an annual report each year. We are in constant communication with Common Ground around the

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time it is taking to fully tenant those properties. I understand what Common Ground tells me about the process for tenanting those properties to make sure you to get the tenant mix right, to make sure you are not creating potential social disharmony within what is a mixed housing community. Common Ground has been very clear with me and Housing that it wants to quite methodically work through the process of tenanting those properties but I can only express my disappointment that the complexes are still not fully tenanted.

Mr DEAN - Are you doing what you can in your area to move it along, to get the proper support for the people needing this accommodation?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, we are. In recent months we have been working with Common Ground around some of these outstanding concerns and working on a memorandum of understanding between Housing and Common Ground around shared objectives and expectations on the part of both parties, and that work is progressing quite well, as I understand it. I wish to see those properties fully tenanted as soon as possible, as does the sector.

Mrs TAYLOR - One of the difficulties, as I understand it, having met with the chair not so long ago, is that originally when Common Ground was first mooted, there was funding to find a list of people who would be eligible - and something around 100 people were on that list.

Ms BRESNEHAN - The street survey.

Ms O'CONNOR - Was it the Salvation Army that undertook that work?

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, but it was funded. That funding has run out; it was not ongoing, it was a project. They have a finite list and have been working through it, but now it is very difficult to get on that list because there is no process funded any longer to get on the list. That may be out of date information.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am aware of that work, which was 50 homes for 50 people, and I participated to some extent, as did my colleagues, Ms Archer and Ms Petrusma. There was as a result of that work, which involved Salvation Army, Common Ground staff and volunteers, and volunteers from other areas in the sector walking the streets and looking for people who were sleeping rough. There was an initial list of, I think around 100 people who were on that list. There are referrals that are made to Common Ground on a semi-regular basis by other support services and community sector organisations. There are people who were not captured by that street survey but who are known to services as seeking accommodation.

[6:15pm]

Mrs TAYLOR - My question is around that.

Ms O'CONNOR - While the work that the Salvos and Common Ground undertook together was really important, the fact that the funding ran out is neither here nor there.

Mrs TAYLOR - Should not be.

Ms O'CONNOR - No, it is not here or there, it is not an issue because there are people right now who are still sleeping rough in and around Hobart. There are people on Housing Tasmania waiting lists who are at high risk of homelessness. We are doing everything we can to house -

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Mrs TAYLOR - I am told that it is very difficult to get on the list.

Ms O'CONNOR - I have not heard that there is a specific list that Common Ground necessarily works off.

CHAIR - Until now.

Ms O'CONNOR - I was aware of the potential list and of the vulnerability assessments that were undertaken as part of that work.

Mrs TAYLOR - That was the issue, they want to do their own vulnerability assessment, and probably rightly so, but it is my understanding that the funding to do those assessments ran out some time ago and therefore it is very difficult to -

Ms O'CONNOR - Who was arguing that they need more funding?

CHAIR - The board of Common Ground.

Mrs TAYLOR - Ms Thomas, to whom I was speaking, but it is now several months ago so maybe they have resolved that issue.

Ms O'CONNOR - As I understand it, that wasn't a state-funded issue.

Mrs TAYLOR - No, it wasn't, correct.

Ms O'CONNOR - There are funds provided to Common Ground if they wish to undertake some of this work. I simply restate what I have already said, that referrals are made to Common Ground by shelter organisations on a semi-regular basis.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am aware of that.

Ms O'CONNOR - I respectfully do not agree that more funds are needed to find potential tenants.

Mrs TAYLOR - No, I didn't say that more funds are needed. I am saying that there seems to be a disconnect between the people who need and are wanting - may be potential tenants - and somehow being able to get in.

Ms O'CONNOR - Sorry, Mrs Taylor, if you took that the wrong way; I was not respectfully disagreeing with you. I was disagreeing that there may need to be more funds from any source in order to identify potential tenants of Common Ground.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am with you absolutely.

Ms O'CONNOR - The work begins in July and from October this year we will have a completely new system of housing intake assessment and allocation and that will be Housing Connect, which is going to transform for an individual who requires housing assistance experience of the social and affordable housing system. For example, if someone presents at the front door service - let us call it that for the want of a better word - who presents as homeless and sleeping rough, in a boarding house or couch surfing, they will immediately be assessed as

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requiring housing assistance. There will be a range of housing options potentially open to them. If it is only crisis shelter support they need, through the Housing Connect process we will be able to deliver that. If it is public housing property that they require and there is a suitable one available, we can allocate through their community housing options - potentially Common Ground.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is what I am saying, will Common Ground be part of that?

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, it will. It is part of the new Housing Connect process which I think was part of the new Housing Connect process. I think it would make life easier for Common Ground in terms of identifying new tenants and what have you, to go through that assessment process.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, I think we have fleshed out that very well. I think that will be useful for that organisation and for those people in need of accommodation.

Mr DEAN - I am not allowed to ask any more questions.

Ms O'CONNOR - I will talk to you afterwards, Mr Dean, if you want more information.

CHAIR - Minister, we offer our appreciation and thanks to you and your team.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that members of this committee really do rigorously go through the budget papers, so I try to be ready for you every year. Of course, I wouldn't be able to do any of this without the outstanding people who put all the work in, some of whom are at the table and some of whom are not at the table.

The committee adjourned at 6.22 p.m.