



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Review of Selected Public Works Committee Reports

41 of 2020: Sorell Emergency Services Hub; and 15 of 2020: Major Redevelopment of Sorell School

Members of the Committee

Legislative Council

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
(Chair)

Hon Meg Webb MLC

Hon Josh Willie MLC

House of Assembly

Ms Lara Alexander MP
(from 16 August 2022)

Dr Shane Broad MP
(Deputy Chair)

Mr Felix Ellis MP
(until 25 July 2022)

Mr John Tucker MP

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Charter of the Committee

The Public Accounts Committee (the Committee) is a Joint Standing Committee of the Tasmanian Parliament constituted under the *Public Accounts Committee Act 1970* (the Act).

The Committee comprises six Members of Parliament, three Members drawn from the Legislative Council and three Members from the House of Assembly.

Under section 6 of the Act the Committee:

- **must** inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any matter referred to the Committee by either House relating to the management, administration or use of public sector finances; or the accounts of any public authority or other organisation controlled by the State or in which the State has an interest; and
- may inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any matter arising in connection with public sector finances that the Committee considers appropriate; and any matter referred to the Committee by the Auditor-General.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

DoE	Department of Education
DPFEM	Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management
FTE	full time equivalent
FY	Financial Year
PWC	Public Works Committee
PWC Act	<i>Public Works Committee Act 1914</i>
SES	State Emergency Service
TFS	Tasmanian Fire Service
TSP	Targeted Support Partnership

Executive Summary

The Sorell Emergency Services Hub and the Major Redevelopment of Sorell School are major projects considered by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Public Works and approved in 2020 (Report Nos 41 of 2020¹ and 15 of 2020² respectively). The Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Public Accounts (the Committee), determined by its own motion to undertake an Inquiry into progress of these two important projects, in light of some identified delays and COVID-19 pandemic related challenges.

The Committee was interested particularly in the progress of the respective development applications and building approvals for the respective public works projects; the potential impact of any delays to the commencement of the projects to the Tasmanian community, the contractors involved in or engaged for the respective public works projects, any financial impact/outcome of respective public works projects and the contingencies in place to deal with any potential contract variations, noting the apparent difficulty in sourcing building and construction materials in the current Tasmanian market.

The Committee was advised by way of Ministerial responses and public hearings of delays that had been identified due to soil conditions and additional community consultation. However, the projects remain on track to be completed within the contracted time frame.

Significant additional costs were largely avoided due to prior planning and procurement of building and fit-out materials and equipment.

The Committee notes that appropriate additional resourcing is critical in supporting schools engaged in major capital works projects. In addition, the Committee notes the value and opportunity provided in terms of attracting emergency services volunteers and collaboration opportunities offered by the new Sorell Emergency Services Hub model and suggests that other local communities throughout Tasmania would benefit with a similar approach to co-locating emergency services.

The Committee also thanks the Committee Secretary (Simon Scott) and Secretariat (Allison Scott) for their assistance during the Inquiry.



Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
Chair

28 September 2022

¹ See Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Works: Sorell Emergency Services Hub (Report No. 41 of 2020), <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/PWC/Sorell%20Emergency%20Services%20Hub/reports/Sorell%20Emergency%20Services%20Hub.pdf>

² See Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Works: Major Redevelopment of Sorell School (Report No. 15 of 2020), <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/PWC/Schools/Reports/Major%20Redevelopment%20of%20Sorell%20School.pdf>

Summary of Findings

The Committee found that:

- F1. despite the projected delays expected with COVID-19, the progress of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub was continuing satisfactorily;
 - F2. the projected delays due to latent soil conditions on the Sorell Emergency Services Hub site will not significantly impact the completion of the works;
 - F3. the new Hub will provide an improved 24/7 emergency services response service to the surrounding area;
 - F4. the Department of Police Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM) had planned contingencies to deal with any potential contract variations during the course of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub project;
 - F5. the progress of the major redevelopment of Sorell School appeared to be progressing satisfactorily;
 - F6. whilst it was conceded by the Department of Education (DoE) that ongoing capital works during a school term was disruptive to the Sorell School (and any school) operations in general, that the Department had supported the School through this difficult period;
 - F7. the potential for a new gymnasium and oval at Sorell School will be explored by DoE through future capital works submission(s) made as part of the Department's annual budget process; and
 - F8. DoE had planned contingencies to deal with potential contract variations during the course of the Major Redevelopment of Sorell School project.
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Summary of Recommendations

The Committee makes the following recommendation to DPFEM:

- R1. DPFEM consider, as part of future infrastructure programs, other sites that would benefit from an emergency services response facility similar to the Sorell Emergency Services Hub model.

The Committee makes the following recommendation to DoE:

- R2. DoE continue to support all schools with appropriate additional resourcing when undertaking major capital works programs to minimise disruption to normal activities.
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Conduct of Review

On 17 March 2022, the Committee resolved to inquire into the progress of public works projects, approved by the Joint Standing Committee on Public Works, related to the Sorell Emergency Services Hub and the Major Redevelopment of Sorell School that were both approved in 2020 (Report Nos 41 of 2020 and 15 of 2020 respectively).

On 21 March 2022, the Inquiry Terms of Reference was made public and made available on the Committee's website:

To inquire into and report upon the Tasmanian Government's progress of public works projects, approved by the Joint Standing Committee on Public Works, related to the Sorell Emergency Services Hub and the Major Redevelopment of Sorell School that were both approved in 2020 (and any other matter incidental thereto), with particular regard to:

- 1. the progress of the respective development applications and building approvals for the respective public works projects;*
- 2. the potential impact of any delays to the commencement of the projects to the:*
 - a. Tasmanian community;*
 - b. contractors involved in or engaged for the respective public works projects; and*
 - c. financial impact/outcome of respective public works projects; and*
- 3. the contingencies in place to deal with any potential contract variations noting the apparent difficulty in sourcing building and construction materials in the current Tasmanian market.*

The Secretary wrote to the Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management) and the Hon Roger Jaensch MP (Minister for Education, Children and Youth) seeking their responses to the aforementioned questions.

Responses to the Committee's questions were received on 27 and 28 April 2022 respectively.

Both Ministers and their respective Departmental Representatives were called and attended the following public hearings on Friday, 17 June 2022 in Committee Room 2, Parliament House.

<p>Hon Roger Jaensch MP Minister for Education, Children and Youth</p> <p><u>Department of Education Representatives</u> Mr Tim Bullard (Secretary) Ms Jenny Burgess (Deputy Secretary Strategy and Performance) Mr Kane Salter (Deputy Secretary Corporate and Business Services) Mr James Burrows (Manager, Office of the Secretary)</p>	<p>Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management</p> <p><u>Departmental Representatives</u> Ms Mandy Clarke (Deputy Secretary) Mr Dermot Barry (Chief Officer, Tasmania Fire Service) Mr Jonathan Higgins (Assistant Commissioner Operations, Tasmania Police) Mr Leon Smith (Acting Director, State Emergency Service)</p>
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During the Inquiry, the Parliament was prorogued twice and suspended once delaying the progress of this inquiry:

- from 6 April 2022 to 3 May 2022 (following Premier Gutwein’s resignation);
 - from 1 to 16 August 2022 (following the resignation of Hon Jacquie Petrusma MLC); and
 - from 13 to 27 September 2022 (following the passing of a condolence motion of both Houses in commemoration of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).
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Background

Sorell Emergency Services Hub

On 7 December 2020, under the *Public Works Committee Act 1914* (PWC Act) the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works (PWC) approved the works to construct an Emergency Services Hub on a new greenfield site in Sorell (47 Cole Street), with Tasmanian Police, the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and the State Emergency Service (SES) personnel to be co-located in a modern, state of the art emergency services facility.³ The Sorell Emergency Services Hub will allow response crews from each emergency service to be directly based in the same area, which is expected to improve critical response times and enhance community safety.



Sorell has an existing police station but does not have a fire station, nor a dedicated State Emergency Service facility in the area. State Emergency Services' Southern Regional unit is the closest SES response to Sorell, located in Mornington 20km away. The nearest volunteer fire stations are located in Midway Point, Dodges Ferry, Orierton and Wattle Hill. The current Sorell Police Station provides policing services to the Sorell municipality, which includes Sorell township, Midway Point, Forcett, Lewisham, Dodges Ferry, Primrose Sands and Orierton. It also services the needs of and provides backup to the one-person stations at Richmond and Nubeena and the two-person station at Dunalley.

³ See Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Works: Sorell Emergency Services Hub (Report No. 41 of 2020), <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/PWC/Sorell%20Emergency%20Services%20Hub/reports/Sorell%20Emergency%20Services%20Hub.pdf>

The estimated cost of the project was \$12 million (Tasmanian State Government provided) with an estimated project completion date within FY 2021-22. The proposed works aimed to provide the following advantages and benefits:

- greatly improving critical response times for road crash rescues and other emergencies;
- enhancing community safety in the South East region
- providing a modern and efficient operating environment contained within the building's functional layout, including state of the art IT technologies;
- reduced maintenance and operating costs resulting from facility sharing and building efficiency;
- increase capacity to deliver emergency service functions to meet the demands of the rapid growth in the South East region now and into the future;
- create an additional location for incident management and incident staging, due to the inclusion of a major incident room/incident control centre;
- improve the Work Health and Safety of employees and volunteers through the provision of state of the art, purpose-built facilities; and
- improve access, safety and security for the local community.

While the current Sorell Police Station will close, the Volunteer Fire Stations and SES units in the South East region will be retained and complement the new facility.

At the public hearing, the Minister Petrusma spoke to the progress to date of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub:

Mrs PETRUSMA - ... by way of background the genesis for this project is the growth in population within the Sorell and surrounding regions. The current Sorell Police Station was built in 1966 and it has received four additional police officer(s) since 2018 under this Government taking its establishment to 16. As such it is no longer fit for purpose nor has the appropriate space, layout, security nor supporting infrastructure for adequate police operations.

Furthermore, as there is currently no fire station in Sorell, and the closest SES unit is at Mornington which is 20 kilometres away, as part of establishing the hub, a new TFS brigade and a new SES unit will be formed in Sorell, which provides an exciting opportunity for this rapidly growing and large community who are interest in becoming volunteers in our emergency services.

This Government has provided \$12 million towards the establishment of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub, which will see the TFS, Tasmania Police and the SES co-located in this large, fit for purpose, state of the art sight at 47 Cole St Sorell, this development represents the first hub of its kind in Tasmania, this project will provide the community with bolstered emergency services now and into the future. This will improve critical response times, including road crash rescue and will enhance for the greater southeast Tasmanian community.

At the completion of the build the Hub will have an overall combined floor area of 2,543 metres and will be future-proofed, as it will accommodate up to 21 police officers and six police vehicles with secure storage for the police boat. It will accommodate up to 80 SES and TFS volunteers including junior firefighter members, include shared indoor and outdoor training facilities, include major incident facilities where state of the art technologies that are critical for setting up a command post or staging area during a bushfire. It will include a volunteer engine bay that can accommodate three appliances and two people movers, include a career fire engine bay that can accommodate three heavy appliances and include a volunteer external storage shed and workshops.

Volunteer recruitment has already been undertaken, and I was delighted to attend the recent recruitment on the second of April this year where locals were able to attend the new site and seek information on becoming a TFS or SES volunteer. I am pleased to advise the committee that 60 people, 30 SES and 30 TFS personnel who live in Sorell and surrounding areas have made applications to volunteer at the new hub for the TFS and the SES. Induction for these new volunteers has already been undertaken at the Tasmania Police Academy on Thursday, 9 June (2022), where they were fitted out for their uniforms, given details on the new hub, the volunteer model, and about the values of the TFS and SES.

What is also fantastic about these 60 volunteers is that because they live in the Sorell area they enable the Hub to have a 24/7 response capability to fire, flood and road crash rescue and a roster system will be put in place to enable the 24/7 coverage and response. There is also good gender and age diversity in the volunteers, with the volunteers having a total of 29 female and 31 male volunteers, and 38 years of age is the average of the recruits.

To make sure that our new SES recruits will be able to perform their roles right from the opening, in the 2022-23 Budget we are also providing \$420 000 for the purchase of rescue vehicles and a storm trailer, which will enable the site to be fully functional when it opens. The significant investment into the Sorell and south-east community, along with other budget commitments of the bushfire prevention and flood mitigation, increasing our police establishment demonstrates our government's commitment to keeping Tasmanians safe.⁴

Major Redevelopment of Sorell School

On 11 June 2020, the PWC approved the works to undertake a major redevelopment of Sorell School with the aim of consolidating the school as an integrated Kindergarten to Year 12 campus and providing contemporary learning environments for the school's students. The main campus of the school is situated at 41 Gordon Street, Sorell. It is the only school that caters for high school aged students within the Sorell municipality. The school also includes an additional Kindergarten at Midway Point.⁵

⁴ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.1-2

⁵ See Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Works: Major Redevelopment of Sorell School (Report No. 15 of 2020), <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/PWC/Schools/Reports/Major%20Redevelopment%20of%20Sorell%20School.pdf>



The estimated cost of the project was \$25.75 million (Tasmanian State Government provided) with the estimated project completion date of May 2024.⁶ The proposed works aimed to provide the following advantages and benefits:

- transform the school as an attractive and welcoming facility with a sense of community ownership;
- create one school by connecting all existing and new facilities;
- create a contemporary, safe and welcoming learning environment from birth to adult;
- consolidation of all facilities into one clearly identified educational and community precinct;
- assist the school in its transition to a major regional education centre for south-east Tasmania; and
- remove aged buildings and infrastructure, refurbish all existing facilities, and provide highly visible and welcoming new buildings.

At the public hearing, Minister Jaensch made the following opening comments about the progress of the Sorell School project:

Mr JAENSCH - ... this is a project that I've been coming up to speed with as the new Minister. I've been reviewing the history of the project since the election commitment in 2018, through the various approvals to development of the master plan and consultation,

⁶ See Department of Education submission to PWC, <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/PWC/Schools/Submissions/Major%20Redevelopment%20of%20Sorell%20School-Department%20of%20Education%20Submission.pdf>

EPAT's approval, the development and approval of a development application, and building and plumbing approvals progressively over the years. Construction has now commenced and I'm very glad to see we're at a point where we've been able to overcome some unforeseen site issues. We've been able to work through an extensive community consultation on the master plan, some rephrasing and staging of the work in response to the request for quotation and the scheduling of works identified by the successful tenderer, Fairbrother.

I'm glad that we have works underway and substantially commenced now. As I understand it, we're on track for completion in 2024.⁷

COVID-19 Environmental Context

The Committee understood that there that Tasmanian construction supply chains were significantly impacted resulting in increases in construction material costs as demand exceeded supply and that there might also be a shortage of skilled labour through COVID-19 restrictions, amongst other building and construction industry drivers, since the approvals of each of the respective projects.⁸

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, in releasing its Producer Price Index to March 2022, noted that the main contributors to quarterly growth in final demand⁹ included:

- output of building construction (+3.0%), driven by increases for materials with supply constraints for timber and metals, high freight costs and skilled trade shortages; and
- the annual rise of 4.9% in final demand to March 2022 was the strongest increase since December 2008.¹⁰

As an analogy, input prices to house construction rose due to ongoing demand in residential construction and increases in material prices. Domestic and global supply remained tight with shipping delays and high international freight costs. Ongoing shortages of timber and increasing metals prices had placed added upward pressure on material costs. Over the past twelve months, input prices to house construction rose 15.4%, due to: timber, board and joinery (+20.6%) and other metal products (+16.2%).¹¹

With regard to the COVID-19 related supply chain and cost pressure issues, the Committee considered the impacts that this might have on the two projects subject to this Inquiry.

⁷ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.1

⁸ See 'Price hikes leave builders on brink', Kempton, Helen, Mercury (Thursday, 3 February 2022), p.3

⁹ Final Demand measures the price change of products (goods and services) consumed with no further processing. For example, sugar cane is a preliminary product and used as an input into the production of raw sugar. In turn raw sugar is an intermediate product which is then used to produce the final product, refined sugar. Final Demand captures final products destined for final consumption, with no further processing (see below n8)

¹⁰ See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/producer-price-indexes-australia/latest-release>, March 2022 (released 29 April 2022).

¹¹ See above n8

Of note, the Committee shared a public media release from an affected local sub-contractor who had recently gone into administration, due to losses sustained during COVID-19. The sub-contractor highlighted that the COVID-19 outbreak had caused increasing costs in products and materials, ongoing delays in projects and a shortage of skilled labour to meet demand. They had also been seriously affected by staff absenteeism due to COVID-19 isolation rules imposed on employees for being close contacts since the Tasmanian border re-opening on 15 December 2021.¹² The company had been sub-contracted to work on both the Sorell Emergency Service Hub and Sorell School Major Redevelopment projects. The Committee passed the media release onto the relevant Ministers for their information. The media release is attached at [Appendix A](#).

At the public hearings, Minister Jaensch commented on future State Government works as it applied to building and construction:

Mr JAENSCH - ... Nobody wants to see Tasmanian businesses struggling. The building and construction sector is at unprecedented levels of activity at the moment. I understand there's a pipeline of \$16 billion worth of work over the next decade. We're working with that industry in other portfolios of mine to grow their workforce by 25 per cent to meet that requirement. That's why we've got initiatives like the hi-vis army, and why we're putting TAFE onto a new footing, so it can be more responsive to industry needs and respond to those sorts of demands for growth in their capacity to deliver projects. These are the best of times in many ways, for a lot of these businesses - but they bring significant challenges as well. We are under no illusions that this isn't an easy time, but it's also an incredibly busy time for the industry.¹³

Staffing the Sorell Emergency Services Hub

At the public hearings, the Committee heard about the innovative approach taken to source both fire and SES volunteers for the new facility. Minister Petrusma and Messrs Dermot Barry (Chief Officer, Tasmania Fire Service) and Leon Smith (Acting Director, State Emergency Service) discussed the following:

Ms WEBB - ... in terms of the newly recruited cohort of volunteers who'll be staffing it, I'm imagining it's the first time in a long while that you've actually populated entirely a new site with an entirely new group of volunteers. What's involved in ensuring that the right support and the right management and supervision is there for those volunteers when they begin...?

...

Mr BARRY - It is unusual for us to recruit and then train 60 volunteers at a time. In fact, this is a new model for us. The SES and TFS have worked together in the recruiting process and now in the training. Obviously, there are different skill sets, so they will start training together - things like first aid and bits and pieces, and other areas around road crash and whatever; but then there will also be specialty streams that they will go into as well. When it comes time, in the interim, as the station is being built and we train up our fire crews, we are going to outpost them - for want of a better word - into the surrounding

¹² See <https://www.facebook.com/Elphinstoneenterprises/> [Accessed 1 July 2022]

¹³ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.7

areas. All the surrounding fire crews have agreed to take a number of them, and get them on the road and mentor them in those early stages as well. Once they go in and start at the station and start to respond to emergencies, we will also keep in mind that we have paid crews at Glenorchy that, in the early days, will respond and support them as well. We can also use our district officers, who are career staff. They will also attend, especially in those early days, just to make sure they are going all right. Their initial training is like a basic level, and then we will continue to develop them as we go on. There is not just one shot and then you are done. We continue to train them and expand their skill set as they work through it.

...

Mr SMITH- ... from a preparedness perspective, we were acutely aware that we are bringing members of the public in to become emergency responders. In their journey, right from induction, right through their career, we have a high level of support that we provide to them in recognition of the fact that they will be confronted with very traumatic events most probably, throughout their careers. Part of their preparedness is taking the opportunity to engage in our wellbeing program, and that starts at induction, where they are made aware of the environment, and made aware of the potential. Throughout their life cycle of volunteering with us, we take a proactive approach to preparing them, but then also a high level of intervention when required in recognition of the things that they face. There are multiple elements, as the Chief has indicated with joint training, to build capability. It is quite exciting.

We are building a cohort of 60 people there, with a brand new culture. That is one of an integrated culture, in recognition that we have two operational arms to deliver a service. The preparedness of them from the mental health perspective and wellbeing perspective is also at the forefront of our minds when providing them the technical skills to do their job.

Ms WEBB - I was listening to the description about the fire volunteers' side of it, and being posted with existing cohorts. Normally, of course, a new recruit into one of your established groups would have experienced people there to be mentoring and come in underneath. In this situation, for your SES volunteers, is there a similar situation where they will be placed with experienced people or where experienced people will be sent in to lead them in the early stages?

Mr SMITH - Yes. The key element in the building of the capability for service delivery from Sorell is road crash rescue. We will be focusing on the elements of the skill sets required to deliver a road crash rescue service. Second to that, would be the storm and flood response. The training regime for the SES volunteers has already been established and has been provided to the members. That includes a distinct focus on getting them on boarded, but also skills acquisition in road crash rescue where members of other units will come along to participate throughout their journey to provide their insights to them. We have a tailored development process for these members, which will include subject matter experts, including from the Tasmania Fire Service.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Can I also say, it was excellent how the department undertook that on the induction days that were run in April. They showed the clear different units of work that each of the volunteers can undertake, if they wanted to go in different streams. We

acknowledge the fact that some want to be behind the scenes, providing support and others want to do operational. I think that is why we ended up with a nearly 50/50 gender split. It was fantastic to see so many people turn up on the day. It was made clear that we embrace diversity and are also letting people know that you do not have to be at the forefront. You can be doing a lot of other support work too. I applaud the department for what they did.

Ms WEBB - Very successful, by the sound of it.

CHAIR - ... it was probably quite the envy of many other areas of the state, to have an expensive new facility and an integrating of a modelling where you have services together. What have you taken from this process that might be used for other parts of the state, particularly in recruitment? ... you obviously have some young people engaged in this process. ...?

Mrs PETRUSMA - The average age is 38.

CHAIR - ... a lot of those people will be working age and more limited in the time they can give, which is a one of the barriers to attracting volunteers. What have you learned from the model here that could be applied to other places?

Mrs PETRUSMA - What this Government has also provided in last year's budget was funding of \$2.4 million to establish a volunteer support unit. There is a volunteer support person for the SES and in the TFS. It is all about volunteer coordination, volunteer recruitment, volunteer retention and to ensure they're aware of the health and wellbeing program. Because their focus is on recruitment, retention, training and a whole raft of other things, it is about attracting more recruits. Especially, where we might have - for want of a better word - a thin market, we try it in our rural and regional areas to attract more. They have now all been recruited. I might ask the Chief and the Acting Director to give more outline as to what their work is entailing.

Mr BARRY - The new volunteer support branch is really targeting our recruitment and retention of our volunteers. Not only keeping the members we have, but we are always looking for good people. Part of the learnings from this was actually, it is a new model for us where we essentially turn up in a town, put out the trucks, put out all the equipment and have an open day. People turn up and opt to respond, often what happens in our established areas, is people get interested, they either see the truck or you move and the new neighbour is a member or whatever else. We tend to draw them that way. We found while that is okay for sustaining, over time, it is not necessarily the best model. One of the learnings from this was the power of having a public display. For when we may be struggling to attract numbers, to get the truck out on a Saturday morning at the local footy ground or whatever else. We do a display and encourage people, because people see it and go, that is not a bad idea. Often, the feedback we get from people in the community was, we did not realise you were still looking, or, we did not know they were short of members or there was opportunity. Raising the profile of our volunteers in those areas and then having the correct support to on board, train and then sustain them is one of the keys to keeping - or in fact - growing our volunteer cohort as we move forward.

Mr SMITH - As we have learnt having an active and targeted approach within communities is essential. The feedback we received from the day in Sorell was exactly that, where they knew something was happening here but did not know we had the opportunity to be part of it. We do know from data whilst ever there is an event of significance within the state or even nationally, that flags interest from people. It is about them understanding they have a direct access into the organisation to be able to flag their interest. Major strategy in regard to attraction, the volunteer support and strategy unit is to be able to go to specific communities and be able to work with existing brigades and units to have community events to attract people in the future.

Mrs PETRUSMA - The Department also did an extensive letter box drop in the area too and a social media campaign to attract.

Mr SMITH - Yes.

Mrs PETRUSMA - We have learnt from the measures we put in place to try to recruit that it was quite successful. We can also utilise this in the future if we do see our numbers are decreased in certain areas. We know what we trialled here, what has worked and what we can now utilise for the future.

Future Capacity and Direction for Sorell School

At the public hearings, the Committee asked a question around the current and future capacity of the Sorell School. Minister Jaensch and Mr Kane Salter (Deputy Secretary Corporate and Business Services) expressed the following:

Mr WILLIE - If I could turn to some capacity issues; what is the current capacity of the school?

...

Mr SALTER - It is 1,250.

Mr WILLIE - And what will it be at the end of the redevelopment?

Mr SALTER - It's maintaining it at 1,250. Current enrolments are 837.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, is there an issue there? You're undertaking a major redevelopment for a growing municipality, and you're maintaining it at the existing capacity. Obviously, the enrolments are lower than that capacity; but it could be a problem down the track.

Mr JAENSCH - They are at two-thirds capacity now, as Mr Salter has just said. There is, as I've said, also a master plan that looks out to the future. We've got a works program that we're undertaking now; but as with all schools across the state, 194 schools, there is a continuous review of their utilisation and also projections for demand. That informs the capital program as well.¹⁴

¹⁴ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.6

With respect to the Department's strategy of making the Sorell School a hub for long-term learning, Minister Jaensch and Mr Bullard explained the following:

Mr TUCKER - ... the school's vision is a birth to adult learning facility. Can you expand a little bit more with regard to that for us?

Mr JAENSCH - Certainly, the inclusion of Sorell as a host for a new child and family learning centre builds on that idea. We want to be able to work from early years through to year 12 in more of our schools. More years, every year of learning counts and every day of learning counts and the earlier we start and the further we go, the better off our kids can be. That is the vision for the site.

There are benefits of co-location because people, kids, families, get used to their learning environment. One of the things that I found that has been most successful about the Government's policy of extending all schools to years 11 and 12 is that there is not a decision to make to leave your school and to relocate or travel to a new one in order to continue your education. To some extent, no decision means staying where you are, doing more learning for more years, and for those for whom that is a path of least resistance, the benefit is kids get more years of learning. It works at both ends of the school journey ...

Mr BULLARD - The original 12 child and family learning centres were standalone centres that were placed on sites that were community-centric. The new six child and family learning centres are co-located with schools. What that shows in between 2010 when the original concept for the centres was initiated and 2022 is the development in the Department of Education's view that it does take responsibility for early childhood learning and development and looking at opportunities to provide more of a one-stop shop in its environment and then, as the Minister said, at the other end you're seeing the implementation of senior secondary in all high school settings.

Sorell provides us with a really unique opportunity to work from birth to year 12 and also into the trade training centres which can be utilised for adult learning when they're not being used for supporting young people. It's a great opportunity to build an end-to-end education precinct and it is really exciting for us.¹⁵

Mr Bullard went on to explain to the Committee as to whether the focus on agriculture would remain at Sorell:

Mr TUCKER - You mentioned there with the trade training focus, and I have a farming background myself, and I note that the school has had a strong focus on agriculture in the past. Going forward, will that strong focus still be there? Is anything changing in that area relating to agriculture and the trade training centre?

Mr BULLARD - Certainly there is an ongoing focus on agriculture at Sorell. There is also an opportunity for us to look then with the development of the Jordan River Learning Federation School Farm about how we're providing a span of training across

¹⁵ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.9

agricultural sectors. Our intention is to continue to refine our approach in training in agriculture and look at the opportunities to utilise sites, especially in the Hobart locality.¹⁶

The Minister and Mr Bullard covered tailoring the community's requirements of the learning experience to be offered at Sorell School:

Mr ELLIS - ... I've been involved with some Public Works inquiry hearings on the new Brighton school and Legana and one of the things I am really impressed with is the consultation and the time taken. I know that there are knockers and why don't we just get on with it and build something cookie-cutter. However, seeing the differences, at Brighton there's a lot of focus that the school community want on Aboriginal heritage; at Legana around open spaces and a more communal model. Looking through the Sorell School, it was interesting how much there was a focus on bringing the community more broadly into the school.

Could you give us a sense of that consultation - like tailoring the learning experiences to the communities themselves? Is it a sort of strategic approach for education?

Mr JAENSCH - ... Part of the strategy, as I understand it, is to give the community some ownership of their school; it's something they can see there, they've helped shape to meet their needs. When we are looking at some communities and some demographics who may not have had a strong positive experience of education themselves and are now parents, we want them to feel confident and positive about their family's engagement with learning for the next generation.

That's been one of the things with child and family learning centres as well. Some of the early models of those were distinctly not at schools, or school-like. They were intended as a different, neutral space, if you like, for parents - young parents in particular - who may not have had a positive experience of schools as institutional environments.

With this school, and the discussion we've just had about the way the child and family learning centre's intended to be co-located and integrated - this consultation, is about reaching out to that community and giving them a chance to have a hand in designing the school the way they want and need it to be. It's so it feels safe for them culturally - safe for Aboriginal families maybe; but very much of a place, rather than being an institution like the one they had when they went to school...

Mr BULLARD - ... The only thing that I would add is, as well as listening to the voice of community and understanding their aspiration for the site, we also have an educational lead on the redevelopments. We have a very senior member of staff who's been a principal and managed a new build, who provides and coordinates the agency's input, in terms of what contemporary teaching, learning and behaviour management looks like. Looking at the Brighton School, for example, there's a lot of educational research that's underpinning that design, to ensure that it's going to be able to be used for modern

¹⁶ As above n 13

teaching and learning; and also that it has aspects around behaviour management, and is safe.

You might recall on the other side, there's an election commitment from 2021 around upgrading toilets and anti-bullying in toilets. We know now that the toilets can be places that aren't safe. So, in that case, we are upgrading our toilet facilities to make them safe. These whole schools are safe. There are high levels of visibility; good movement of students and staff; areas that can be used for a whole host of different things - moving away from having a classroom that's locked down to one particular purpose.

In terms of the Brighton building, particularly one of the things that I really like is that the outdoor learning spaces are featured through that central causeway and also up on the hill, which is going to be used for Aboriginal history and culture.

We used to just build schools -probably like many of us went to - that were the cookie cutter red brick schools that I grew up in, but now we've got those two really important inputs that are giving us great environments.

Mr JAENSCH - I expect that with the advent of some new capabilities in our schools, through things like the safeguarding officers in schools, there will be intel brought to bear on the design and operation of our school environments, which is also going to ensure that there is 'designed in' safeguarding as well, in terms of the ability for there to be visibility of spaces.

Those are things that I believe we'll see gradually informing the design of our learning spaces more as well, through those officers in our schools and that network, and lessons learnt across that network being shared as well.¹⁷

With respect to the question as to whether co-location of child and family centres in a greater school complex like Sorell was optimal, the Minister and Mr Bullard responded to related questions:

Mr WILLIE - ... in terms of the child and family centre co-locations. I am interested, Minister, whether the Department has looked at the engagement of the community with child and family centres that are currently located next to schools - like Beaconsfield, for example - or ones that are in the heart of the community - like Chigwell Child and Family Centre - because we know that there are some families not engaging with child and family centres where it would (be) optimal. I'm interested in whether the Department has looked at that and whether there is going to be any impact, because they are on school sites. You talked about people's view of the institution of school; they might have had a bad experience themselves and that might prevent them walking through the door.

Mr JAENSCH - And that's where perhaps I was drawing the nexus of those things being the opportunity of those communities to be brought in on the design of these redevelopments for this school - creating another way back in, another sense of

¹⁷ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.10-11

ownership and a softening, I suppose, of what might have been their traditional attitudes to schools and learning as well. ...

Mr BULLARD - ... It's a really interesting question. Our data doesn't show that those centres that are co-located with schools get less throughput, which I think is the basis of the question. Certainly, anecdotal evidence would be that the demographic and community influences are probably the biggest driver of attendance and so, one of the things that we've now moved toward is outreach. There is amazing throughput in those centres; that's great, but who's not there? We have officers going out into supermarkets, parks, places where parents may gather to understand 'have you attended the service?'; if you haven't been to the CFLC, why not?'. That's the next major drive for those centres to make sure that we are capturing the largest number of parents and carers and children in those communities. But going back to your point, no. There isn't a delineation, that I can see.¹⁸

¹⁸ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.11

Sorell Emergency Service Hub Responses

Response to Question 1 – Progress of Development Application and Building Approvals

The development application for the Sorell Emergency Services Hub was approved on 25 March 2021. A request for tender for building works was advertised in July 2021. Works commenced in November 2021 and the Emergency Services Hub is scheduled to be fully completed in early 2023.¹⁹

At the public hearing, the Minister Petrusma spoke to the delay in commencing the construction project:

Mr WILLIE - ... In terms of the budgeting for this project, in the 2018-19 Budget, this project was due for completion in 2022. That went out to 2024 and they're now saying 2023. It's still a year's delay. Is there any explanation for that?

Mrs PETRUSMA - It was re-profiled because of the expectation to deal with COVID-19 at the time, and also materials. The building works should be completed at the end of this year and the fit-out will be done and the building will be opened in early 2023, which is a lot earlier than what the profile is across the forward Estimates in the budget.

Mr WILLIE - After it was revised.

Mrs PETRUSMA - It has now been revised back. So, Treasury is very well aware that we will be pulling that funding back forward. So, looking forward to opening the new facility along with the volunteers and police officers early 2023.²⁰

Committee Findings

F1. Despite the projected delays expected with COVID-19, the progress of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub was continuing satisfactorily.

¹⁹ Ministerial response to Committee submitted through Minister Petrusma (dated 20 April 2022)

²⁰ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.4

Response to Question 2 – The Potential Impact of any Delays to the Commencement of the Projects

The Sorell Emergency Services Hub, as well as housing a police station, involved the establishment of a new volunteer TFS Brigade and a new SES Unit at Sorell. A volunteer recruitment drive for the TFS and SES commenced in March 2022, with recruitment sessions held on 2 and 3 April near the construction site of the new Hub. This recruitment drive had a strong response, with 39 applications already received.

The 2021-22 Budget allocation for the Sorell Emergency Services Hub had funding being finalised in the 2023-24 financial year. Since this time, due to the progress of the construction, the project was now expected to be finalised in early 2023, with funding to be brought forward to 2022-23 to align with this finalisation timeframe.

Civil work was halted in December 2021 due to latent soil issues. The halt in construction was largely over the Christmas period, with recommencement in February 2022. The pause did not affect the contractors involved during this period, given it was largely over the Christmas period, and had not impacted the overall construction timeframe.²¹

At the public hearing, the Minister Petrusma commented on the latent soil issues at the worksite:

Mrs PETRUSMA - Soil testing was undertaken in November 2021 that indicated the quality of the soil had deteriorated significantly. As a result of the deterioration, the civil engineering was required to be redesigned and site civil works halted just prior to Christmas 2021 until 15 February 2022. Fairbrother continued with other work during this period to minimise any overall project delays.²²

In addition, the Minister commented on whether there would be any impact on other emergency services in the area and the likely improvement in emergency services response times:

Mr WILLIE - Will it have any impact on other emergency services in the area? Will there be a realignment of volunteer brigades or anything like that?

Mrs PETRUSMA - No, because the surrounding fire stations will continue as they are, because we committed to not closing any of the surrounding fire stations. The advantage of having this new hub in Sorell is that we now have 60 volunteers, 30 TFS and 30 SES that we didn't have before, which is very exciting for the Sorell community because they now they will have a 24/7 presence which they didn't have before.

...

Mr WILLIE - Are we going to see an improvement in response times and things like that?

Mrs PETRUSMA - For the Sorell area, definitely, because the nearest SES unit is 20 kilometres away. The fact that now the SES doesn't have to travel down from

²¹ Ministerial response to Committee submitted through Minister Petrusma (dated 20 April 2022)

²² Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.3

*Mornington, especially with the roadworks in the area and the causeway and everything else, they'll be based in Sorell, which means quicker responses, especially the Tasman Peninsula and surrounding areas.*²³

Mr Leon Smith (Acting Director, State Emergency Service) commented on how far would the Sorell Emergency Services Hub was likely to service:

Mr WILLIE - How far will they go from the emergency services?

Mrs PETRUSMA - It is south-east community and I'll ask the acting director.

Mr SMITH - The gazetted areas are in the process of being established. We have a road crash rescue unit down the Tasman Peninsula and Nubeena. Part of the strategy for establishing the capability at the Sorell Emergency Services Hub is in consideration of support into the Nubeena area for storm and flood events, as well support for road crash rescue.

We have a tiered response to road crash. Part of the strategy to enable the Sorell hub is initial response, like a primary response rapid intervention road crash. And then a secondary response vehicle to follow that up in the event that it's more technical.

So, it will be down into the Peninsula area, yet to be defined. Our response up the east coast, up into the Triabunna area at this point, we're potentially yet to be further scoped. That's subject to reassigning boundaries for the current unit at Swansea and how far south the SES unit from Swansea come.

Mr WILLIE - That work will be done before it's opened?

*Mr SMITH - Yes, absolutely. That's being scoped now in collaboration with the Tasmania Fire Service who provide road crash rescue services from Hobart Fire Brigade and Clarence at the moment.*²⁴

The Minister also commented on the impact mitigation on nearby residential properties to the Sorell Emergency Hub:

Mr WILLIE - My other question is the impact on residential properties nearby. Has that been mitigated, or has there been extensive consultation with the neighbouring properties, and do they have an understanding of what's going to happen?

*Mrs PETRUSMA - As it was explained during Public Works, extensive consultation was taken with neighbours and with council. For example, light mitigation, and there's been a lot of work in regard to disability parking at the site. I think everyone's quite excited that they're going to have a 24/7 facility that's in a good location. As you can see, the volunteers and the people in the community really embraced the fact that we're now going to have 60 volunteers for this new site. It's pretty exciting.*²⁵

²³ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.4-5

²⁴ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.5

²⁵ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.5

Committee Findings

- F2. The projected delays due to latent soil conditions on the Sorell Emergency Services Hub site will not significantly impact the completion of the works.
- F3. The new Hub will provide an improved 24/7 emergency services response service to the surrounding area.

Committee Recommendations

- R1. DPFEM consider as part of future infrastructure programs other sites around Tasmania that would benefit with an emergency services response facility similar to the Sorell Emergency Services Hub model.
-

Response to Question 3 – The Contingencies in place to deal with any Potential Contract Variations

Regular site meetings were conducted with the contractor to discuss delivery times. Through these meetings, items with longer lead times than normal had been identified and ordered well in advance to mitigate delay. As an example, these items have included roof trusses and structural steel.

Strategies were identified and managed to deal with any potential variations and to directly reduce the impact of sourcing building and construction materials.

Alternative construction materials are also put forward at these meetings for discussion, e.g. if any delivery delay was expected on documented materials. The impact of COVID-19 was being closely monitored and managed by the contractor.²⁶

At the public hearing, the Minister Petrusma MP noted that the expected sale of the soon to be surplus Sorell Police Station would assist in keeping the contracted project works close to budget:

Mrs PETRUSMA - I can advise the Committee that the total cost of the development will be \$12.8 million and, of that, the sale of the police station at Sorell is envisaged to cover about \$550,000 or more of that cost. This is because the Sorell Police Station site is a large site, it's very close to town, it's a large block, and it's very close to all amenities, and it was a former residence as well, so that will help to address that and the remaining budget overrun will be covered within the operational budget of the DPFEM.²⁷

Committee Findings

F4. DPFEM had planned contingencies to deal with any potential contract variations during the course of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub project.

²⁶ Ministerial response to Committee submitted through Minister Petrusma (dated 20 April 2022)

²⁷ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) - Sorell Emergency Hub \(Minister Petrusma\)](#), p.3

Major Redevelopment of Sorell School Responses

Response to Question 1 – Progress of Development Application and Building Approvals

The development application for the project was approved in March 2021 and building and plumbing works approved in September 2021. Following a competitive public tender process, Fairbrother was selected as the successful contractor (\$24,598,248 total contract value).²⁸ Construction works commenced onsite in September 2021 and were scheduled to be completed in September 2024.²⁹

At the public hearings Minister Jaensch and Mr Kane Salter (Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Business Services) spoke to the current progress of the early years and child and family learning centres, and the overall stages of contracted works:

CHAIR - ... there was a commitment to incorporate or build a child and family learning centre. This was a separate project but it would be part of the construction, if I understood that correctly. Is that right? If it is, how is that proceeding? The Public Works Committee was told that they expected that to be built in the 2022-2023 year and you said earlier that the school was on track to be completed in 2024.

Mr JAENSCH - I understand that the child and family learning centre component will commence once enabling works for the school redevelopment are concluded. I expect that has to do with some of those site civil and services works. ...

Mr SALTER - The early years and the child and family learning centre are in stage 2 of the planned works. There are due to commence in early 2023 with estimated completion the end of 2023.

...

CHAIR - You know in the Public Works Committee report how at 2.9 there is the outline of the areas A, B through G, there are records all the way to G, which is a later project, as I can understand. Can you give us an update as to where you are up to in this process?

...

Mr SALTER - In terms of stage 1 works, which cover broadly admin, primary and senior, secondary, have commenced with the contractor and completion is due early 2023.

Stage 2, which is covering, as I mentioned, the early years and the child and family learning centre, that's due to commence early 2023 with completion late 2023.

Stage 3, the junior secondary, is due to start late 2023 with completion late 2024.³⁰

²⁸ Awarded contract for Sorell School Redevelopment and Child and Family Learning Centre (F273), Tasmanian Government Tenders, <https://www.tenders.tas.gov.au/ContractAwarded/Details/10327>

²⁹ Ministerial response to Committee submitted through Minister Jaensch (dated 28 April 2022)

³⁰ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.3

Committee Findings

F5. The progress of the major redevelopment of Sorell School appeared to be progressing satisfactorily.

Response to Question 2 – The Potential Impact of any Delays to the Commencement of the Projects

In progressing the project, a number of factors needed to be carefully considered, including:

- the need to undertake extensive community consultation;
- the requirement to stage construction to allow the school to continue to operate; and
- the addition of the Child and Family Learning Centre into the project scope.

Further, a delay to the supply of timber roof trusses due to a national shortage had delayed progress of construction, which is occurring in three phases over a total of three years to allow the school to continue to operate whilst new buildings were added and then others renovated.

The school continued to operate during the construction phase, and as such, the impact to the local community arising from delays was nominal. The school had provided regular communication to its community and neighbouring businesses and residents about the progress of the redevelopment, and the Department of Education had engaged closely with the Sorell Council, whose Mayor has been a member of the Project Working Group.

The Tasmanian construction industry remained buoyant which together with labour and building material shortages related to the COVID-19 pandemic, was broadly impacting construction project budgets and delivery timeframes.³¹

At the public hearings, Minister Jaensch and Mr Kane Salter (Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Business Services) spoke to the concern around building material shortages and workforce issues:

CHAIR - You're not concerned about building material supply shortages and workforce issues, in terms of completing the works on time?

Mr JAENSCH - They are pressures in the operating environment in the market for every building and construction project that's running at the moment, Chair. Never say never; but my understanding is that we've got our contractors on site now, they're experienced, we've worked with them before and they've got a schedule that they're projecting that they know they can meet. I'll ask Mr Salter if he has any updates.

Mr SALTER - That is a correct assessment, Minister. They are matters that we continue to monitor on an ongoing basis. At this stage, the contractor hasn't provided any indication that we can't meet that end time frame.³²

³¹ Ministerial response to Committee submitted through Minister Jaensch (dated 28 April 2022)

³² Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.3

The Minister and Mr Salter further commented on the delay to commencing the capital works:

Mr WILLIE - Minister, this project in the 2018-2019 Budget was due for completion in 2021; it is now due for completion in 2024. In your correspondence you put that down to extensive consultation. Was that the main cause of the overrun in time line?

Mr JAENSCH - I understand there have been a few different factors, including consultation and re-phasing of elements of the project to be able to achieve it. There have been changing market conditions. I understand that there have been some site factors to do with the conditions underground that we've needed to be able to work with - rock on the site and other things like that - which have altered the design and the construction approach. They're the elements that have been brought to my attention as factors that have contributed to the delay. ...

Mr SALTER - ... The two key components are extensive consultation - which the Department is doing across all the major projects to make sure we get the right input from the school, the community at the front end - and, in terms on the contract, the two tenderers that responded - and factoring in the conditions that members have commented on - sought a three year time frame rather than a potential two year time frame.³³

In addressing the issue as to whether the impact of the delays was nominal or not, the Minister and Mr Tim Bullard (Secretary) shared the following:

Mr WILLIE - Minister, the other thing in your correspondence I thought was a little bit concerning was that the impact of the delays is nominal, that the school continues to operate. I've spoken to people within the school community; it is having an impact on learning and the operation of the school. Some of the things I've heard is that there have been capacity issues for the grade 11 and 12 extensions. I've heard that they are in the trade training centre now and that adult education has had to move out of that centre into the Sorell municipality. The child and family centre development has been impacted; that's been talked about a little bit because of the delays and that's due to take place at the end of stage 2 of the development.

But, I've heard that the child and family centre group are doing pop-ups and things now in the Sorell municipality. I've also heard that there are issues because stage 2 and stage 3, which is the primary school part of the redevelopment, mean that two netball courts currently closed. There's a basketball court closed, which means that activities are limited for the students because of the delays. And the main oval is not in service, which I've heard is contributing to behaviour issues...

Mr JAENSCH - ... Right across the board, we have a lot of learning infrastructure and capital works. We have an unprecedented budget this year and across the forward Estimates, and over recent years, to do a lot of catch-up and reinvestment in this infrastructure right across the state. We recognise the pressures on some of the ageing

³³ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.3-4

infrastructure, some of the capacity issues in some areas and maybe some underinvestment previously that might have averted that.

We're catching up on that and we have \$250 million dollars in the current Budget and across the forward Estimates to remedy that situation. We'll keep investing, because of the sorts of issues that you raise right across our school system.

I've been briefed on our process for monitoring and prioritising capital works and how we invite schools each year to put forward their projects and their priorities, and how they are ranked and how investment is applied across those...

Mr BULLARD - We certainly recognise the resilience of schools when they are undergoing major capital works projects and we support school leadership to work around what is effectively a building site. It's not ideal.

I was fortunate enough to catch up recently with the school leadership of Sorell and whilst there are definitely challenges at the school, their narrative was very positive about both the redevelopment and behaviour management in general. I mentioned at Estimates that the work they are doing to recalibrate their approach to behaviour management, coming with a really positive mindset, is paying real dividends for them.

We'll continue to support the school, as we do with all schools through the capital works. We have to accept that in redeveloping a site as big as Sorell, there are trade-offs, but I think as you would have gone to openings - and I have - that once they get to the end of it they believe that the concessions that needed to be made during construction are worth it.

Mr JAENSCH - I understand that it's also is a two-way street, because the construction time frame and the staging of works has also been informed by the fact that school is still happening in those schools.

It might have been quicker if this site was not operating as a school. It could be that the works program could be delivered more quickly; but some of the drawing out of the time frame is in response to the need to be able to decanter and move students into other interim arrangements so that school can continue.

Mr WILLIE - It is less than ideal, though, Minister isn't it; because there would be some students that will probably start in grade seven - maybe finishing grade ten - and go down the road to one of the colleges, who will experience Sorell High School as a construction site? It is extremely disruptive to student learning.

Mr JAENSCH - We've got construction underway at a lot of schools around the state. In each case the projects are managed to be as least disruptive as possible, but also to deliver a better learning environment as quickly as possible.

It's part of the craft of project managing these things and having a significant capital works program for education.

Mr WILLIE - I think everyone can agree that new and better facilities that are purpose-designed are a good thing. It is about the delays here that are of concern and the disruption that it is causing.

Mr JAENSCH - And again, that is part of the juggle that is always required when we are providing upgrades to schools that are being used and occupied. Unfortunately, that also means that sometimes those projects take longer to deliver because we are working around an operating school.³⁴

With respect to the potential for a new gymnasium and oval at Sorell School, the Minister briefed the Committee:

Mr WILLIE - Minister, I know it wasn't part of the public works report and it's not really called stage 4, but there is further development flagged in the master plan around a gymnasium and new oval.

Will that take place once this work is completed?

Mr JAENSCH - I understand that the gymnasium and certain other items that were originally identified through the master planning have been identified as things that are outside the envelope of the available funding for delivery of the priority upgrades and there will be capital works submissions made for those through the Department's annual process.³⁵

The Minister and Messrs Bullard and Salter described to the Committee the lengths the Department of Education went to engage with the local Sorell community:

Ms WEBB - I am seeking more detail on the answer that was provided about the impact on local community arising from the delays being nominal. It says here, 'the school has provided regular communication to its community and neighbouring businesses and residents and engaged with the council' it mentions. Could you talk in more detail about what that has looked like and how you have managed that interaction with the community?

Mr JAENSCH - ... I understand that the project - from the master plan through - has had a project working group overseeing it. This includes representation from the school itself, the school association, the department and also Kerry Vincent, the Mayor of Sorell. The community has had opportunities to be involved in that master plan process and the feedback on it ...

Mr BULLARD - To set some context, we've really changed our approach to community engagement on capital expenditure. Traditionally, we would have had an announcement, the design would have been done and we would have delivered the project. We now have what we call our Get Involved campaign, which you may have seen around a number of major infrastructure projects that are underway. We have people who are working in the

³⁴ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.4-5

³⁵ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.5-6

facilities area whose single focus is ensuring that communities are engaged and consulted and kept up to date on the progress of the builds that are underway. Some of that communication relating to opportunities to come to community consultation or updates is prepared centrally and sent out. There were rounds of community consultation on the master plan as we refined the community's thinking and helped them to develop their aspiration for the site.

Going forward, a lot of support is put into allowing the school to be communicating about how the project is progressing. Regarding engagement with the council, that's sometimes done through the Minister or the Minister's office, and other times it's done through our facilities services keeping the general manager up to date with progress and answering any questions.

Mr SALTER - Perhaps just to add to that, in conjunction with the Council we do use the Sorell Times as a platform for communication.

Ms WEBB - So, it's been the school's role to be doing that communication not just with its school community, in terms of updates on progress, but also with the local businesses? You mention here, 'with its community and neighbouring businesses and residents'.

Mr BULLARD - Sorry, I probably wasn't clear, there's a range of communications that are prepared in consultation with the school for the school community. Centrally, the broader aspects of the consultation are undertaken out of facility services and are now in communication.

Ms WEBB - Has that been a regular program of communications, or is it just when it has deemed as needed?

Mr SALTER - As the Secretary mentioned, there are ongoing regular project meetings they would make sure that as key communication was required, that that occurred.³⁶

Noting the delays surrounding the project, the Committee asked what support was being given to senior staff. In replying to the Committee's request for further information during the public hearings, Minister Jaensch provided the following response:³⁷

Question: Redevelopment of Sorell School - What additional staffing allocation has gone to Sorell to support the redevelopment?

Answer: Sorell School is currently being provided with a Targeted Support Partnership (TSP). The TSP reflects that Sorell School currently has increased complexity of which one contributing factor is the major capital works.

The support partnership provided additional Assistant Principal staffing of 1.4 full time equivalent (FTE) in 2021 and 2.0 FTE in 2022.

³⁶ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.7-8

³⁷ Letter to Hon Ruth Forrest MLC Chair – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School Public Hearing - Responses to Questions taken on Notice, 17 June 2022 (dated 5 July 2022)

All Department of Education schools are supported with additional administration resourcing through the School Resource Package when completing a significant capital works build.

Sorell School was provided \$5,000 in 2021 and \$20,000 in 2022. Over the life of the project, the total additional administration resourcing provided for is \$60,000. Part of this funding has been utilised for school staff, including base grade teachers, to participate in working groups and consultative committees linked to the works.

Committee Findings

- F6. Whilst it was conceded by DoE that ongoing capital works during a school term was disruptive to the Sorell School (and any school) operations in general, that the Department had supported the School through this difficult period.
- F7. The potential for a new gymnasium and oval at Sorell School will be explored by DoE at a future capital works submission(s) made as part of the Department's annual budget process.

Committee Recommendations

- R2. DoE continue to support all schools with appropriate additional resourcing when undertaking major capital works programs to minimise disruption to normal activities.

Response to Question 3 – The Contingencies in place to deal with any Potential Contract Variations

Regular site meetings were conducted with the contractor to discuss delivery times. Through these meetings, items with longer lead times than normal had been identified and ordered well in advance to mitigate delay. As an example, these items have included roof trusses and structural steel.

Strategies were identified and managed to deal with any potential variations and to directly reduce the impact of sourcing building and construction materials.

Alternative construction materials are also put forward at these meetings for discussion, e.g. if any delivery delay was expected on documented materials. The impact of COVID-19 was being closely monitored and managed by the contractor.

A contingency had been set aside and the Department's project team continued to work closely with the contractor to monitor and manage the project budget and any contract variations.³⁸

At the public hearings, Mr Salter advised the Committee about the current status around the supply of building materials necessary for construction:

Mr TUCKER - Minister, can I ask you about the supply of the timber roof trusses and the supply of building materials and how that is progressing? As you've noted in this letter, there's been an issue in the delay. Can you update the committee a little bit more about that and the issues?

...

Mr SALTER - ... Earlier the timber and trusses had caused an impact, and in reference to the earlier question, that was part of the delay from December to April. It was a matter that was outside the control of both the Department and the lead contractor. That previous impact isn't impacting the end time frame or the stage time frames that we're now working to with the contractor.³⁹

Mr Salter assured the Committee that Sorell School project operated within the contingency available to it at that point:

CHAIR - ... regarding the contingencies, prior to tendering the construction estimate provided by the quantity surveyor was \$24 million which allowed for a total contingency of \$2.22 million. Then the tenders were higher than the quantity surveyor's estimate. The awarded construction contract was \$24.598 million, with \$1.447 million set aside in the project budget for contingency.

I am interested in the ongoing costs and I note costs rises. In your response to significant delays for the timber roof trusses due to a national shortage, have costs been able to be contained by looking at the contingency being perhaps not adequate to meet the actual

³⁸ Ministerial response to Committee submitted through Minister Jaensch (dated 28 April 2022)

³⁹ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.8

bill because the quantity surveyor suggested a contingency of \$2.22 million and the contract was for \$1.447 million for contingency.

...

Mr SALTER - The project continues to operate within the contingency available at this point. That will continue to occur along all stages of the project. At this point there is no flagging of needing additional contingency over and above what is there at the moment. But it is in phase 1 of the three phases and that continues to be monitored through the superintendent of the project with our facilities team on a monthly basis.⁴⁰

The Minister also provided commentary around the windfall sale of the Midway Point Kindergarten:

CHAIR - ... about the sale of the Midway Point Kindergarten; it was going to be used to supply funding to the redevelopment project. Has that been sold and, if it has, for how much?

Mr JAENSCH - I understand that the kindergarten was deemed surplus to the Department's needs. Disposal has occurred and \$800,000 has been redirected to the redevelopment of the Sorell School.

CHAIR - I think they were expecting \$750,000 so that money is quite large.

Mr JAENSCH - This is one area where property prices have worked in our favour.⁴¹

Committee Findings

F8. DoE had planned contingencies to deal with any potential contract variations during the course of the Major Redevelopment of Sorell School project.

⁴⁰ Transcript of evidence, [Public Hearings \(17 June 2022\) – Major Redevelopment of Sorell School \(Minister Jaensch\)](#), p.2

⁴¹ As above n 38



ELPHINSTONE

E N T E R P R I S E S

engineering excellence and trust

Media Release

On Monday the 11th April 2022 Elphinstone Enterprises of Burnie was placed into the hands of the Administrators Shaw Gidley due to losses sustained during Covid.

The Covid outbreak has caused increasing costs in products and materials, ongoing delays in projects and a shortage of skilled labour to meet demand. We have also been seriously affected by staff absenteeism due to Covid isolation rules imposed on employees for being close contacts since the border re-opening.

Although we have battled through the pandemic to this point it has been a long hard road. We thought that our situation was improving when we obtained over \$1.3m worth of contracts in the middle of 2021 to be completed by the end of January 2022. To date, these projects have not been completed for the following reasons:

- Olympia Stadium – August - Completed
- Kingston Bike Park - September - Aboriginal artifact search not completed, project delayed until 2022 and has subsequently been handed to an alternative fabricator
- NWRH Antenatal Unit – October – Soil samples conducted weren't adequate, ground too hard, Project delayed until January – Not completed
- MacKillops MDT Extension – November - Continuous Engineering Changes – January 2022 – 75% complete.
- Dominic College – December – 10% completed main project not started not started, issues obtaining concrete tilt up panels
- Sorell high School – December – Site issues - Started onsite 11/4/22
- Sorell Emergency Services – January – Plumbing permit not issued – started onsite 4/4/22 all areas not accessible until after easter

These delays have not been caused by us but have resulted in our demise and are a direct result of Covid. The industry is overheated, and engineers, architects and project managers are not able to meet agreed timelines that were set in good faith at contract signing. As a result, a manufacturing business like ours is left with production gaps (empty workshop) which we were unable to fill after entire projects are moved out. Furthermore, we were unable to seek further work as projects are rolled into the future taking time that should have been available for new projects. As a result, 6 months work has turned into 10 resulting in unrecoverable losses.

Further issues were created due to staff losses. Staff are being offered higher paying roles with other employers and covid isolation requirements have dropped our available work hours significantly meaning that we could not produce the materials in timeframes required to meet the new program targets. As a result, we have had to relinquish some of our contract commitments because we are unable to do 6 months work in a few weeks.

We have tried our best during the pandemic. We have restructured and reduced management wages costs, we have worked closely with the department of state growth, business consultants and our bankers, but we have exhausted all options for finance and support. Covid has won!

Elphinstone Enterprises Pty Ltd ABN: 19 151 116 237 / ACN: 151 116 237

26 River Road, Wivenhoe / PO Box 3060, Burnie MDC, Tasmania, 7320 / P: 03 6431 9301

E: admin@elphinstoneenterprises.com.au / W: elphinstoneenterprises.com.au

Our aim now is to save the 30+ employees jobs and make some restitution to creditors by this administration process. It is not our intention to liquidate the business as this will lose jobs and result in further unrecoverable losses to creditors.

We are disappointed with the current Liberal members for Braddon both Federal and State, we have made numerous attempts to reach out for assistance over the last few months, but silence has been their reply. We would like to thank Rebecca White, Anita Dow and Chris Lynch for their empathy and support in dealing with this Covid related business failure. Something not expected from this lifetime Liberal supporter.

We hope this administration process will allow us to restructure and return to the solid core business we had before the Covid outbreak removed our profitability and sent us to the wall.

Shaw Gidley Contact:

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