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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON FRIDAY, 17 JUNE 2022

PROGRESS OF SELECTED PUBLIC WORKS: SORELL EMERGENCY SERVICES HUB AND THE MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT OF SORELL SCHOOL

Mrs JACQUIE PETRUSMA, MINISTER, WAS CALLED; **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 WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome, Minister, and thank you to you and your team for attending the Public Accounts Committee. The committee has established an inquiry into the works underway for the Sorell Emergency Services Hub. One of our committee processes is to look at public works when they're completed as well as during their construction.

We appreciate the responses provided to the committee in relation to this inquiry. Before we start, I will invite you to introduce your team and we'll start with them taking the statutory declaration.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Thank you, Chair, and I'm delighted to have with me today Mandy Clarke, Deputy Secretary, Business and Executive Services; Dermott Barry, Chief Officer, Tasmania Fire Service; and Jonathan Higgins, Assistant Commissioner Operations, Tasmania Police; and Leon Smith, Acting Director, State Emergency Service.

CHAIR - I am sure you are all aware that as this is a public hearing, everything that you say before the committee is covered by parliamentary privilege. It will be transcribed and form part of our record and therefore inform our report. If there was anything of a confidential nature in relation you can make that request to the committee and the committee will consider it, otherwise it is all public section. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement if you wish to or your team to do so and then there is enough questions please.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Thanks, Chair, and thank you the committee for inviting us here today to talk about the progress of the Sorell Emergency Services Hub 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 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.

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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 site 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 2543 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, 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.

CHAIR - Thank you, do any other members want to say anything?

Mrs PETRUSMA - No chair.

CHAIR - I will open with questions with this but I go back to the Public Works Committee report. The committee says on page 18:

Mrs PETRUSMA - Sorry Chair, did you say, what page?

CHAIR - Page 18 of the Public Works Committee report, paragraph 4.16. The committee understand that funding of \$12 Million was committed in 2016 for the project.

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I note that information in the Public Works Committee report but that amount did not change, obviously, Minister, particularly in terms of escalating costs and things like that, would not hold these things as intended within that \$12 million.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Do you say in the public works report, what page is it, page 18?

CHAIR - Page 18 yes.

Mrs PETRUSMA - What was your question on the \$12 million, Chair?

CHAIR - That was what was, if you like, signed by the Government in 2016, and we know there have been significant cost pressures in that time. My question is, will the whole project, as envisaged from 2016 when the funding was allocated or announced originally, be able to be delivered within the \$12 million, or will there have to be variations that see perhaps some things not done?

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.

CHAIR - I also note in your response, and Josh might like to follow up on this, but the second work was hopefully December 2021 due to latent soil issues. Can you outline what that was related to?

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.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, in terms of your correspondence back to us, you said that there was no impact to contractors through that period. Are you aware of any contractors that were impacted through that period?

Mrs PETRUSMA - I will have to ask Ms Clarke.

Ms CLARKE - Not to our knowledge. In terms of overall construction, in terms of keeping progressing through that period, but not to our knowledge.

Mr WILLIE - I have a press release here from a sub-contractor and they go into great detail about their business being impacted by COVID-19. I do not think they are blaming the delays on a specific project, but they do name this project in their media release. They talk about the impact of COVID-19 on their business. Things started to turn around when they were awarded \$1.3 million worth of contracts but a number of delays on these contracts then ended up with the business being put into administration for the employees. They talk about the Sorell emergency services hub from January with no permit for plumbing being issued, and they couldn't get on site until April.

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Mrs PETRUSMA - April this year?

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mrs PETRUSMA - What contract was it?

Mr WILLIE - Elphinstone Enterprises. I can provide the press release to you if you like.

I guess the comment from the Minister that you have got obviously the lead contractor. Does the responsibility lay with them or the Government?

Ms CLARKE - Through you, Minister, the lead contractor would be Fairbrother, and they would actually contract a range of works out as part of the construction schedule. So, we can follow up with them if you like, just to verify that. But we have no knowledge of that.

Mr WILLIE - Okay, the committee can provide that to you.

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 reprofiled 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.

Mr WILLIE - Do you have a specific date in mind?

Mrs PETRUSMA - As soon as possible, early 2023. The building itself is expected to finish later this year.

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.

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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.

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 kilometers away. The fact that now the SES doesn't have to travel down from 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.

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.

CHAIR - Just to follow up, Minister, if I could on the overrun at \$8 million, that was correct, isn't it?

Mrs PETRUSMA - \$800 000.

CHAIR - \$800 000?

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Mrs PETRUSMA - Yes. It's not an \$8 million overrun. It's going to be a \$12.8 million project.

Mr WILLIE - You wouldn't be laughing if it was.

Mrs PETRUSMA - It's \$12.8 million and as I said, the majority of that will be covered by the sale of the Sorell Police Station.

CHAIR - About \$550 000 you'd expect?

Mrs PETRUSMA - Yes, probably minimum \$550 000, especially in the market at the moment and it's on a very large block.

CHAIR - It hasn't been sold yet?

Mrs PETRUSMA - No because we need somewhere for the - it will be sold once the police are decanting to the new Sorell Emergency Services Hub.

CHAIR - That money will all go into this to meet the shortfall?

Mrs PETRUSMA - Yes.

CHAIR - Just in terms of the components of the \$12 million that was allocated, there was a \$100 000 which the Government was contributing to the right of way (indistinct) from the council chambers to (indistinct) I assume that is still being delivered, the project, within the \$12 million?

Ms CLARKE - That's correct.

CHAIR - Okay. Have any other members got any questions?

Mr ELLIS - I'm happy to go, Chair. Minister, I think you and I were actually on the Public Works Committee hearing when we -

Mrs PETRUSMA - We were.

Mr ELLIS - And Mr Higgins, I think you were there too as well. I certainly remember wellbeing on the site where we're building this new hub and I think everyone that was in attendance on that day was pretty impressed with the potential upgrade. We toured the existing Sorell Station and it was pretty poky and outdated, for want of a more technical term. I certainly see that - I saw at the time that it was definitely value for money and I think the committee agreed. It's encouraging that it's being delivered on time, ahead of schedule and really coming together quite well. Any other risks that you see in terms of rolling this out? It all seems pretty straightforward to me, to be honest.

Mrs PETRUSMA - No, it's going ahead very well. Chair, I'm happy to table some pictures that were taken yesterday at the site, if that helps the committee in its deliberations.

CHAIR - Yes, that's fine,

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Mrs PETRUSMA - I've a whole heap of pictures on infrastructure here that show how well it's all going but it is a very large build and it does represent very good value for taxpayers' dollars. I just want to commend the department for all the work that they've done throughout all of this because they've been working closely with the contractor to ensure that it is - throughout this whole process too, especially during COVID-19 and where other developments have experienced shortfalls in different building materials. The department has worked very closely with the contractor to make sure that we can get this done and on time. We're nearly on time.

CHAIR - Meg, did you have a question? It's a bit hard to see from here, sorry.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I did have some but they've been covered by other members. Probably the only other area that I had in mind - it's not necessarily to do with the building of the facility - but 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, given they are all quite new and fresh and shiny?

Mrs PETRUSMA - First of all, Chair, I'd like to table a picture of our volunteers, who are all looking very happy. Their first induction day was on 9 June, 52 attendees attended their first induction and I just wanted to commend the chief officer and the acting director, who did outstanding work that night. The other eight will be receiving their kit very soon but there they were given brand new PPC and everything else. I will hand over to the Chief Officer.

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 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.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that. Is there anything further to add, in terms of the SES side of the volunteer support?

Mr SMITH - Yes, 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

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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 onboarded, 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 - Just on that, if I might, 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? None of which (inaudible), you obviously have some young people engaged in this process. James, I think you said it was 48 or 38?

Mrs PETRUSMA - The average age is 38.

CHAIR - Yes, 38. That is quite young. Obviously, 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?

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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 onboard, 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.

CHAIR - You cannot offer a new building though, necessarily.

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Mrs PETRUSMA - Everyone wants one now. The department is doing a new strategic asset management plan for the future. As part of that we will consider other hubs, maybe best located. Where we can, we are doing dual purpose facilities, like the TFS and the SES, for example, have been doing a number of facilities where they combine the two different emergency services in the one building, because they are very complementary to each other. It is something that is now actively considered for new stations going forward.

CHAIR - Minister, also in our remote areas, where there is a heavy reliance on volunteer ambulance officers, would that be considered to bring the three together? Some of the volunteers work in probably more than one emergency service as a volunteer. Is that the sort of thing that you would look at to try to increase your number, and an opportunity to provide a new facility for some of those places as well?

Mrs PETRUSMA - There are a couple of areas where Tas Ambulance is in combination with the Tasmania Fire Service, for example. In the department, we have Police, Fire and SES, our focus is on that. Of course, if there is an area where Tas Ambulance can be as well, we would look at it. In Sorell, because Tas Ambulance had a different location just down the road, it was not appropriate for the ambulance service to be located at the same site, because they were literally just up the road.

CHAIR - That would be a police station anyway, wouldn't it?

Mrs PETRUSMA - That is right, that is a career station, pretty new.

Mr WILLIE - Some examples where you are moving them apart, like Glenorchy. There is a new ambulance superstation.

CHAIR - Any other questions? John, did you have anything you wanted to ask?

Mr TUCKER - I have a statement, Chair. I would like to congratulate the Minister and her team for a fantastic project.

Mr Willie - Hear, hear.

CHAIR - Verging on a Dorothy Dixier, but not quite.

Ms WEBB - Not even the effort of a question.

Mr TUCKER - Pretty straightforward.

CHAIR - Any other members have any questions that they wanted to ask, at this point? No? Thank you, Minister and your team. We did talk quite a bit about this in Estimates as well. There is not much new to it, I guess, but we do appreciate the opportunity to call a meeting with your team with a project on foot. It is important to check on how these things are going, as well as after the event. Thank you for your time and that response, thank you.

Mrs PETRUSMA - I thank the Chair and the committee. Again, I commend the department because they have been doing an outstanding effort in regards to this as well. We are pretty much looking forward to its grand opening in early 2023 and we will make sure you are all invited.

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THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.
