

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 1 – PREMIER AND FINANCE**

**Friday 30 August 2024**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **THE LEGISLATURE**

**UNCORRECTED**

**The Committee met at 9:15.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham (Chair)

Ms Abigail Boyd  
Dr Amanda Cohn  
The Hon. Wes Fang  
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine  
The Hon. Mark Latham  
The Hon. Cameron Murphy  
The Hon. Bob Nanva  
The Hon. Chris Rath

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. Ben Franklin**, *President of the Legislative Council*

## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 812  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

**The CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the third hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 1 - Premier and Finance inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Jeremy Buckingham, and I am the Chair of this Committee. I welcome the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Ben Franklin, and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Legislature.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. Welcome, again, and thank you for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Mr President, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn because you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament.

**Ms MARGARET PALMER**, Director, Financial Services and Governance, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of New South Wales, sworn and examined

**Mr MARK WEBB**, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of New South Wales, affirmed and examined

**Mr DAVID BLUNT**, Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. During this session there will be questions from Opposition, crossbench and Government members from 9.15 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and from 11.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. We will now commence with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Thank you all for your attendance today. Well done on all of the bicentenary celebrations. We all had an excellent night on Saturday and at the Evensong as well, for those who attended. What further could we expect from the bicentenary celebrations, in particular, the King's visit later in the year?

**The PRESIDENT:** A particular interest of yours, Mr Rath.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Thank you for putting in a portrait of the King as well.

**The PRESIDENT:** You're welcome. The next time you visit my office, you will also see one in my office.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** And one in mine as well.

**The PRESIDENT:** It has been a wonderful bicentenary, to be honest. What we've tried to do by acknowledging this really significant milestone is to reflect on our past in an honest way to celebrate our present and to imagine the future of democracy in the State. That's why we've got the slogan for the bicentenary as "reflect, celebrate, imagine". We've done a whole range of things, and they have been very successful. We've had not just this last weekend, which was the real anchor, being 200 years to the day since the first sitting of the Legislative Council, but we had our open day, which was wonderful, where over 3,000 people came into the parliamentary precinct. There was the world premiere performance of the commissioned work from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

We also had a lecture running a couple of times from Paul Brunton about the building. We had exhibitions. There was the grand final of the public speaking competition; there had been regional competitions throughout the State to select the winners. I acknowledge that Mr Fang was there, and I thank him for being there. It was just a fantastic day. Apart from that, we've done a whole range of other things. We've had seminars. We had a "Then & Now" seminar, and I appreciate both you and Ms Boyd being panellists on that seminar. Also, we had a CALD seminar. Thank you, Mr Nanva, for appearing on that. We had one on pride and precedent. Our next one will be on the Wiradjuri, as mandated by the Parliament.

We're also looking at a range of other issues. We are launching the new Indigenous artwork, which will be unveiled—which we talked about in the previous budget estimates—in a couple of weeks time. We have a major exhibition, which will be in the Fountain Court from October to December, and a lovely launch of that. We have our final in the conference series in December, which looks at the whole genesis of the Legislative Council. And, of course, we have the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, which will be held from 4 to 8 November at the International Convention Centre, where 800 parliamentarians from 56 Commonwealth nations across the world will come to Sydney. It's the biggest gathering of parliamentarians in the world, the opening ceremony of which it's my intention to invite all members of the New South Wales Parliament to, whether delegates or not, because I think it'll be a really special event and an opportunity for people to build relationships with our Commonwealth friends.

In answer to your specific question about the potential opportunity of a royal visit, of course that is something that we will absolutely welcome. You will have read commentary, along with others, about the visit and the potential health of the King, His Majesty. We're still in discussions with the Palace and with Government House, but we remain ready and stand ready to host His Majesty if he is able to and wants to visit the Parliament at any point in his visit to New South Wales.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Well, if not the King, then hopefully William and Kate, not Harry.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I know there's a severe lack of wall space at the moment, particularly with all the exhibitions. What was the intention regarding the portraits of all of the Premiers that used to be on the wall in

the hallway between the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council? Are they going to be restored or find a new home? What's the intention for those?

**The PRESIDENT:** That's a good question. This is the first time anyone has raised it with me. You would be aware that when the Rum Hospital was refurbished, that's why the artwork disappeared. That's why the busts were moved from the foyer to the theatre and so forth, so that the work could be done without damaging them, and that was the same for the portraits of the Premier. It would be my intention to put them back. There may have been a decision taken before I became President on this issue of which I'm unaware, but that would be my intention. I would throw to Mr Blunt or Mr Webb, if they have anything further to add on this issue.

**MARK WEBB:** One of the issues we had with the Premiers gallery was that we had run out of space. You might remember there were various sizes of pictures. One of the things we have been looking at is, if we are to restore it, can we restore it in a consistent way so that we have consistent sizing, consistent spacing and perhaps some space for more Premiers into the future as well. I would not put it to the Presiding Officers to pick their favourite Premiers and least favourite Premiers to have some removed, so we want to try to find a way of doing it. In the longer term, I am concerned that we will eventually run out of space in that location, so we are also looking at whether there are alternative locations that might be a little less space constrained for the future. It's an "in progress" work now. I hope you all saw the temporary timeline that we put up there for the open day. I think that was a fantastic temporary thing to put in there, but it is an active consideration for us at the moment.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** It was looking very cluttered, and I was wondering how many more Premiers you could actually fit on that wall.

**MARK WEBB:** We were looking at having to remove a couple. There were a couple of Premiers that did not serve as Premier for very long, but I did not want to remove anyone going through. I was thinking more historically rather than more recent times, but I do acknowledge that I may have inadvertently caused some humour there.

**The PRESIDENT:** I should make it very clear that if and when the Premiers wall is re-established, everyone who served as Premier of New South Wales, no matter for how long, will be present on the wall.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes. A very long time ago there were people that served for a matter of weeks, but we don't want to remove anybody. I do think the time for the Premiers wall to be in that space is probably limited, but we'll see what we can do in the meantime.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** A question that probably all the members and staff will thank me for is about the lifts. I think one was down in the last sitting week. Could you provide an update on where that's up to and what we can expect in the future?

**The PRESIDENT:** I'll make some preliminary remarks and then throw to Mr Webb. As you know, and as we've detailed in previous committee hearings, we are replacing the passenger lifts one at a time. They take, if I remember correctly, about 14 weeks.

**MARK WEBB:** Sixteen weeks.

**The PRESIDENT:** Sixteen weeks to replace a lift. As you know, the first one has now been done and is excellent. In fact, the evidence is that it is now double the speed, in terms of getting people to and from places, of all of the other lifts, which is great. But we're working our way through it. The problem that we had on the sitting day was that one lift is always offline, of the five, because it's obviously being upgraded. The problem we had during the sitting day is a second lift came offline as well.

Frankly, that's the reason why we need to replace the lifts—because they're breaking down—so that was evidence, if anything. What we have done, though, is ensure that there's a lift technician on site whenever the Parliament is sitting so that these problems can be fixed and attended to as quickly as possible. But the fact that the lifts are a problem and that they're breaking down is exactly the reason why they need to be upgraded, and they haven't been in the 44 years that the new building has been operational. Mr Webb might have further to add on that.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, definitely all of that. After this second lift is restored in the passenger space—it'll be done by the end of September—we have three more to do after that. They take about four months each, so we've got another year's worth of work to finish them off. Unfortunately, there isn't a 16-week break in the parliamentary calendar at any point, so we do have to cover sittings. That's also, unfortunately, why we can't do more than one at once. If we had a longer break—for instance, if this was happening over the end of a parliamentary term—we might do a couple at once when the building is less occupied. Unfortunately, we can't do that.

August 2025 is roughly when we think the work will be finished, but I'm pleased to say we've also been updating the three goods lifts. The first two have been done; the third one is being worked on at the moment and will be finished by the end of September. Many people who use the northern part of the tower block—in this public forum, I say no-one should be using the goods lift except for the transport of goods, but I do recognise that for people in the northern end of the building it is somewhat used. With that third goods lift back online, I think that will alleviate some of the stress.

Obviously as we progressively update each of the lifts, the overall reliability of the system should get better. But, as the President said, the parts and components of those lifts are 40-something years old, and they are breaking down. As the President said, we do have a lift technician on board every sitting day. That means we can start working on them quicker, but there is the possibility of it locking down. We do have a protocol in place with both Houses to inform the Clerks immediately if there is a lift breakdown so that Presiding Officers or whoever is in the chair can make the call about whether to extend the length of time for a division bell, for instance, if there are issues with a lift, and we enact that protocol each time. We will continue to work to try to update things, but it'll be August 2025 before we've finished the program of works for all of them.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** An issue that came up in the last sitting week was the integrity agencies bill. This is a more independent way of funding the integrity agencies. In that debate there was discussion about what it means for The Legislature in terms of the appropriation that The Legislature in the future would seek, and how that operates with the Executive Government. What's your intention in terms of—I think the Special Minister of State made a comment about seeking what other jurisdictions do in this regard. I think the Federal Parliament has a system with a House committee, a Senate committee and a joint committee. What options are you looking at or working on with the Special Minister of State in terms of what they would look like in the future?

**The PRESIDENT:** David and I have had discussions with the Special Minister of State about the best practice in terms of what could be done in terms of independent oversight of The Legislature and its budget. The Federal Parliament, as you rightly point out, does have, in effect, three committees who oversight the budget bids for the running of the Parliament—the running of the Senate and the House of Representatives. They meet, I believe, once a year. It's only agenda item is to consider and to discuss those items, and, in effect, to hold the Treasurer to account about that expenditure. However, we know that this is a really important issue that we would like to get right.

We think that there is more opportunity for more transparency and oversight for The Legislature budget. In a few weeks time—I don't think the date has been confirmed yet—the Clerk and I, along with the Speaker and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, will be travelling to Canberra to meet with our various counterparts to talk about what they're doing as a starting point. From all the evidence that we've seen, it seems like there is sensible stuff that's being done in Canberra. We'll be contacting all of the other State Parliaments to determine if and what procedures they've got in place in order to allow for some objective transparency and accountability in terms of this specific issue, but the Clerk of the Parliaments might have some more comments to make on this issue.

**DAVID BLUNT:** By way of background, I would remind you all that in the last parliamentary term the public accountability committee did some really important work in this space, looking at measures that could be put in place to provide further certainty, independence and integrity to the budget arrangements for the integrity agencies and also for the Parliament. The public accountability committee made two reports. I think they're really the background to the bill that is currently before the Parliament and that's now passed the Legislative Council. The committee, in its first report, made a number of recommendations.

It recommended the adoption of the model that we see at work in the Federal Parliament—with the House of Representatives appropriations and staffing committee—to consider the House of Representatives department budget bid and make recommendations to a Senate committee on appropriations and also a joint committee dealing with the DPS budget bid. That was the primary recommendation of the committee in its first report. The first report did also flag another alternative model that we see in the House of Commons in the UK and also in some of the Canadian jurisdictions—a body like a commission or a board for the Parliament.

I think I can speak for not only myself but also my colleague and friend the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly in saying that we see those models as not appropriate for the New South Wales Parliament, because they don't work in a bicameral Parliament. You can't have a single body of commission or board with members of the Legislative Assembly, for instance, making recommendations about the budget for the Legislative Council and vice versa. When these models have been proposed in the past, they've tended to be proposed to have a majority from the Legislative Assembly, for instance, which would be totally an affirmer for an independent, sovereign, separate upper House. So, yes, we definitely wouldn't support any move down that track. That's not what's being contemplated now. What's being contemplated at the moment is the Federal model, and that's why

we're off to Canberra in a couple of weeks for discussions with the Speaker, the President and the Clerks down there.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** While I've got you on a roll, Mr Blunt, I wanted to ask about SO 52s. I know Ms Boyd might have questions maybe on this as well. When we heard evidence from the Premier's estimates the other day, particularly from the department, there was a little bit of confusion as to what the hold-up is in terms of the electronic production of SO 52 documents. Is it that there's a hold-out from the Cabinet Office or are there also concerns from you and your office about the electronic production? Can we expect or when can we expect the production of SO 52 documents electronically in the future?

**DAVID BLUNT:** I can indicate that there's not, in any sense, a hold-out from the Cabinet Office or from the Executive Government. My office and the Procedure Office—in fact, the whole of the Department of the Legislative Council—remains committed to the goal of electronic production of documents ordered under Standing Order 52, and the Cabinet Office shares that goal. We each see that there are significant potential efficiencies to be gained through that, and enhancement of transparency and accountability of government. It is a complex process, though. We've been collaborating with them for some time on this.

I wish I could give you better news. The short answer to your question is that, realistically, I don't think we'll see much further movement on this for at least 12 months. I can give a longer answer that will explain the reasons for that. I am conscious of your time. I can either start that answer now or, if there are going to be further questions on this subject, I can elaborate a little later. It is a complex subject. We're still committed to that goal, but it will take some time. In fact, it might not be a bad thing that it takes a little bit more time because information technology is evolving so fast. There may, in fact, be some better solutions just around the corner than some of the ones we've been looking at to date.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I might come back to that later.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Thank you to the panel that has come here this morning. Is it correct to say that, in the recent renovations to the building, the alarm system that had existed on the Macquarie Street perimeter fence was disengaged and is no longer operational?

**The PRESIDENT:** It will shock you to know that I might throw to Mr Webb on that one, Mr Latham.

**MARK WEBB:** There were times through the process where we did have to shut down. For instance, we had to redo the electricals through the forecourt et cetera. There were times that it had been brought down. To the best of my knowledge, it's back up and running again now. I will ask my crack team, who I know are watching today, to let me know if there are any current issues with the perimeter security. I will either answer you later on or take it on notice. The intent is for the perimeter to be restored to where it absolutely should be.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That effectively means that, for anyone approaching the fence from inside the Parliament grounds, the alarm goes off.

**MARK WEBB:** Or if anyone attempts to stick something through the fence or things along those lines. My crack squad says that, no, it is back in place and, indeed, has been upgraded as a part of the work.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That's good news.

**MARK WEBB:** There are times where—for instance, when we have large protests outside—we might turn it off for a short period of time while the special constables are watching because otherwise it would be going off all the time. But, yes, it's in place and upgraded.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There has been heightened concern about security for MPs. That has been in the media. When will the current review of the security of State MPs in this building be completed?

**The PRESIDENT:** There are a whole range of things that we have done. Let me go back a step. I should say from the beginning and make it very clear that if anyone has any specific concerns about security issues, we encourage them—in fact, we strongly ask them—to speak to DPS Security, who can provide both tailored advice for their own personal situation but also if they're concerned more broadly about the precinct. They can provide specific advice. They can evaluate risks and threats and recommend mitigations and so on. We have initiated plans for a full review of security in both this precinct and within electoral offices, and also the security of members themselves in terms of their offices, if they're in the Legislative Assembly, or their homes as well.

There are a number of things that we've done already, if that would be of assistance. We're doing a full review of security passes. We've removed all disabled profiles to ensure that only active passholders have access to the building. We've limited a significant number of those passes to only being able to apply from 7.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. on Monday to Friday. DPS Security has actually proposed more actions around security passes. There's a security working group which is considering that, and then that will come up to the Parliamentary Executive

Group. We've improved security measures around Chambers during sitting periods. We've enhanced the CCTV coverage. We've rolled out a new security system in electorate offices. You would've seen an email from me maybe two or three months ago where the NSW Police Force is working closely with individual parliamentarians on a special project that people can opt in on and have a local plan made for their own security with their local Police Force. If people do opt in for it, their local police will call them and make that happen.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Isn't that police review also looking at the building?

**The PRESIDENT:** I believe so.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** When will that be completed?

**The PRESIDENT:** I don't have a specific date. I don't know if you do, Mr Webb.

**MARK WEBB:** We're in the process of commissioning it at the moment. One of the things we're working on with the people doing the review is how long they will need. They're coming in to have a look at the building and then they're going to give us a time frame for it. We want it as quickly as possible to inform both the immediate actions we could take but also if there are further budget bids that we have to make if we want to up the security in particular areas. We need the information by November, otherwise we can't put those budget bids together.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** President, you mentioned upgrading the security of the Chambers. What does that involve?

**The PRESIDENT:** It involves having more vigilance around the special constables and having them be physically closer to the Chambers in case there are issues that need to be dealt with with speed within the Chamber.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I see that the Parliament has advertised for a program manager, hinting at a new IT system to be developed in the immediate future. What does that involve?

**MARK WEBB:** We're doing a lot of IT systems. Do you have the title of the role there?

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** It's just listed as program manager for a new IT system to take us into the cloud, instead of the current system, which is internet on premise.

**MARK WEBB:** That's probably the Parliamentary Information Management System, I would say. Krista, who has been working on that project for many years—and I give a shout-out to Krista; she has done a fantastic job—has moved into doing some work on longer term strategy for us, so that created a vacancy in that particular role. The Parliamentary Information Management System, or PIMS, which is the system that is used on a day-to-day basis, started to be worked on in 2014-15. Back then, there was no cloud-related provision. As a result, it is more susceptible to outages that happen here at the Parliament. Anything new that has been done in that system for the last couple of years has been done in the cloud, but the legacy parts of it are still sitting on premise systems. That project is, in part, to move the legacy system into the cloud like the newer parts of it. But also, as you might imagine, things have moved on a fair bit since 2014 and 2015. We have a list of enhancements people would like to see to make the system move better and more smoothly, so we'll be making those enhancements as well.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What's the projected date to turn off the legacy system?

**MARK WEBB:** There's a fair bit of work in it. We can only do it at the rate that our external supplier can work on it. There are probably a few years worth of work in moving things over, because at the same time we're also making the enhancements that people are asking for.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That's very general—a few years. There's no target date?

**MARK WEBB:** Not a specific target date.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Moving into the cloud has the benefits you outlined, but it also raises cybersecurity concerns. That, too, has been publicised. I'm sure you get advice about a certain country in particular. What is being done there in terms of cybersecurity for this new system?

**MARK WEBB:** Mr President?

**The PRESIDENT:** No, please.

**MARK WEBB:** I don't want to steal anyone's thunder. I might just make a couple of comments about cybersecurity more broadly and then specifically about the system. You're quite right: Six years ago we didn't have a cybersecurity team. We just did some general stuff. Now we have a dedicated team of six people and all they do is cybersecurity-related work. When we move to the cloud, there are a couple of things. Firstly, we only



move to the cloud in jurisdiction, so we don't move any data offshore anywhere. All of the data that we store in the cloud is stored in Australian jurisdictions. That's incredibly important. To pick a slightly less controversial country—although it depends on your point of view—if you look at the Patriot Act, for instance, in America, that gives the American Government the capacity to take any data that's stored in an American jurisdiction and look at it at any given time.

As you'd imagine, there are other, perhaps less friendly to Australia countries where that would be even more the case. We do make sure that all the cloud data is stored in an Australian jurisdiction. We, generally speaking, use the Microsoft cloud product Azure. They spend more money per year on security than the entire Parliament's budget going through there. So moving to the cloud actually enhances the security of the systems that we have rather than reduces it. There was a persistent rumour that I had a button on my desk that I could just press and cut us off from the internet in case of attack. A red light would go off and I'd press the button and we'd be cut off from the internet.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I thought that was for the lifts.

**MARK WEBB:** Never—smooth operation of the lifts at all times. That was not the case. We were more vulnerable with our on-premise systems than we are with the cloud.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In terms of capacity of staff to know, adapt to and be competent in this new system, what are we doing to teach the staff as the final rollout date approaches?

**MARK WEBB:** That's an excellent question because cybersecurity preparedness is—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** No, not cybersecurity. I mean how to use the new system.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, of course.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I mean not just how to be secure but the operational aspects of it.

**MARK WEBB:** Sorry, I misunderstood. Yes, absolutely. We will have intensive change management programs. I would say to this forum, and to everyone listening who might have used the old systems, this is probably something we didn't do as well as we could have in the past. We would roll out systems—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There were a lot of complaints five years ago.

**MARK WEBB:** Absolutely, and we have learnt from that. We will have extensive change management processes, including training, but we've also built in—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** When do they start?

**MARK WEBB:** We will roll it out module by module, and we will do that as we roll it out, module by module. I do want to say to the whole Committee, it's not that we disappear behind closed doors for a few years and then pop out with a new system. We will be rolling it out section by section, training people as we go, but also, more importantly, building in the feedback loops. Danielle and the team in Digital Transformation are building in much better feedback loops to say, "If we're moving this from on-premise to the cloud, what are your pain points in using this system? How do we fix those pain points as a part of doing this?" The new system should be better attuned to how people actually use it, as opposed to, perhaps, in the past where we've been a little more technical in how we do it and not taken the user perspective as far into account as we should. It's an excellent question and something we are focusing on a lot at the moment.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** There's increasing recognition in the broader community that period products are essential, like having toilet paper or soap in a public toilet. The Queensland Government's putting period products in schools. New South Wales councils are putting them in public toilets. There's a wonderful organisation Share the Dignity which has vending machines that dispense free period products. They're going into community centres, hospitals and domestic violence refuges. Will the Parliament provide period products for staff, for members and for visitors?

**The PRESIDENT:** I'll start and then throw to Mr Webb, if I may. The first point is I absolutely agree with the premise of the question. I believe this is definitely something that the Parliament should be doing. I think that we have a responsibility as a leader in terms of both the culture and the services that we provide in this space to set an example for other organisations across New South Wales. I am 100 per cent in favour of doing that. The second point is there has been significant work done on this already. We are very close to being at a stage—and I'll throw to Mr Webb here because I don't want to say we will be doing this from this date, but hopefully Mr Webb will be able to provide us with some information about when we're going to start doing this from.

**MARK WEBB:** It is an excellent question, not just, as you said, for the people that work in the building but also for visitors coming through. We have a long history, like our change room down on level 6 which is

designed for people with severe mobility constraints. We have a history of trying to provide features for the public when they come in here. In fact, I think that change area is one of the only ones in the Sydney CBD that is accessible by the public more generally. So, yes, conversations are very well advanced. We have quotes. Essentially the people that provide the bins and some of the other things in the bathrooms also have offerings in this space, so we've been negotiating with them. We're very close to finalising those negotiations. I am hopeful, and, in fact, I'll make a commitment here which will spur my team on to even greater heights. We're looking at concluding those negotiations within the next few weeks and so I would imagine it would be maybe one to two months before it rolls out across the Parliament.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will also make it clear for the record that it is my instruction that this happens as quickly as possible.

**DAVID BLUNT:** If I can just add, Mr President, as the leader of a department where 70.9 per cent of our staff are women, I'm delighted to hear the commitment from Mr Webb.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thank you both for your commitment and your enthusiasm. That's much appreciated. Last year, Mr Webb, you advised the Committee that to include non-gendered titles in the HR system onboard system was underway. Can you update us on that?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, absolutely. The underlying core system SAP, which we use for HR, and the HRonboard system, which is the system that we use to onboard people into the organisation, have both been updated to include the Mx title. Also in the onboarding system, there is an option for someone to say, "The way I would prefer to refer to myself is not listed here and I would like to—", and then someone from the HR team contacts the individual and says, "Okay, yes, that's great." In our old SAP system, Mx is as far as it would be pushed, but we are in the process of starting a project to replace that system. It is 25 years old and runs all of our pay runs, so it needs to be working well.

We have made a core requirement of that project the capacity to add an extended list of titles that could be included there. With that new system in place, we'll be able to extend that a little further in terms of the default list. But as I said, because we know that these replacements take a while, you don't want to get them wrong, so we put in place this other process to see if we can capture anyone who isn't captured by the Mx title and make sure that we can reflect that. It is not as structured as I would like, but it is the best we can do until we replace that core system.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thanks. Moving forward with those new systems, I appreciate that in the style guide for other New South Wales government agencies, it's best practice to provide an option to opt out of having a title entirely.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, absolutely.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Is that the intention with those new systems?

**MARK WEBB:** Absolutely, that is the case. In fact, I think—and, again, my clerks will correct me if I get this wrong—in the HRonboard system there is an option at the moment where you can say, "No, I don't have a title." I think we've worked out a way of flagging that in the SAP system as well. It requires a manual intervention, if I'm remembering correctly. But we can do it for that. We just can't extend the list of titles any further than Mx in the underlying system.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Just to clarify the current process, people can identify that their preferred option isn't on the list, and they are then proactively contacted by HR?

**MARK WEBB:** That's correct, yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Good morning to all of you. Can we talk about the plans for upgrading the accessibility of Parliament? I know there was some money put aside in the budget, which is good. Can you tell me what that is looking like?

**The PRESIDENT:** I can, if you give me a moment. Accessibility is something that is extremely important to me and, obviously, it is legally binding that we must do this. This is not going to be something that will be able to be—I think—probably ever fixed. It's going to be an ongoing journey. We will rely on not only receiving expert advice but also people providing us with feedback, as you have done previously, and a range of other members around the building have. We've done some very important work over the past couple of years. In the LA Chamber, for example, for obvious reasons, there's been significant accessibility improvements in terms of providing access under the main table, widening the barriers between the advisor's gallery and the Chamber roof, automated doors in the Speaker's square and the LA Chamber and so on.

We've levelled out the floors in the Rum Hospital. We've put captioning on the broadcasting for both Chambers and all committee hearings. We published the first disability inclusion plan back in 2022. We've improved lighting levels in the Chamber and so forth. We have provided accessible ramps in the Speaker's Garden and the Hospital Road entry and exit. But there is much more to be done. What we're doing right now is obviously on level 2. People would be aware that the gym and recreation facility have been closed, from memory, from 15 August and will be closed, from memory, until mid November.

**MARK WEBB:** That's correct.

**The PRESIDENT:** One of the most important parts of that refurbishment is, of course, providing an accessible solution—a ramp—for people to be able to get into the gym. At the moment, they simply can't. It is inaccessible, and that's unacceptable. We're also refurbishing the squash court to make it suitable for a range of multipurpose activities—not just for able-bodied people who can play squash, for example, but for things like yoga and other things. We're renovating the bathrooms in the level 2 recreation facilities to provide access there as well, and some other things. The next item that we're looking at—and I appreciate the funding from the Government in this area—is the gatehouse project. You've drawn attention to this too—and I might comment on that in a moment, if I may—in terms of ensuring that all people can enter and exit the Parliament in the same way. Accessibility is not just about having the capacity to access; it's about having a quality of access and ensuring that everybody is treated in the same way. We're very conscious of that.

Our budget bid was successful in providing a \$7 million upgrade to the entry and exit from Macquarie Street. The planning work is happening for that now, but the actual works—because they'll be quite substantial—won't be able to be done until we've got a significant break, which will be, in effect, in the election period in 2027. That's when that will be done. But I think if you're looking at exiting the building, at the moment, to exit the building it requires assistance from staff. That's just not acceptable. You, by the way, raised an issue in a previous meeting—not a budget estimates meeting, but another official meeting at the Parliament—about some people being let through before somebody in a wheelchair. I wanted to make it clear—and Mr Webb might have more comments to make about this—that we took that very seriously and immediately asked for a response to that and have issued instructions again on how all people should be treated as they come into the building.

There's more to be done—you've raised accessibility—on further issues in the Chamber. I understand that needs to happen. Clearly the level 9 garden is an issue. Currently the only way to access that garden from the tower block is with stairs. We're conscious of that. We're conscious of a range of different issues. Once we lock down the Macquarie Street entrance, we're looking at changes that need to be made to the Hospital Road entrance as well. We're considering what needs to happen in terms of the level 9 garden, but we are open to all suggestions about other ways that we can make the Parliament a more appropriately accessible place for everybody. I've talked for a long time, and Mr Webb may have further comments to make on that.

**MARK WEBB:** We've been focusing a little on the physical access, which is incredibly important. I acknowledge that what we think of as the Parliament House building is actually seven different buildings. The Rum Hospital, each of the Chambers, the Speaker's wing, level 9, I think at the top of the Fountain Court is a separate building and then the tower block is the seventh building. If you've ever been at the north corner up near the Clerk of the LA's office and seen the different levels that you have to go up and down to get there, you can see where that might create challenges.

Some of the biggest challenges we have are around access through the front of the building, where the current steps from the forecourt are, and access into the galleries of the Chambers. They are both very difficult issues that have defied a lot of attempts to find solutions for. We have dedicated money this year to do a more comprehensive piece of work to try to identify some solutions that might work in that space. I do acknowledge that there are heritage dimensions to this as well. Some of the solutions, for instance, that we've come up with in the past have just been utterly rejected from a heritage point of view, and reasonably so. They would have fundamentally changed the front of the building. But we have dedicated money to try to find innovative solutions to deal with those kinds of issues.

I also want to highlight that accessibility isn't just about physical access around the precinct. We're doing some work on wayfinding in the precinct at the moment. If you have a vision impairment, for instance, or you could only see high contrasts—not just in terms of perhaps being blind, for instance, but if you could only see high contrast—we're trying to look at ways to use either technology or different signage approaches to help people way-find around the building a little better and upgrading the maps on the website so that people can pre-plan their work in there as well. You would have seen the daffodil, the hidden disability—we've been training people on how to deal with hidden disabilities. We had a member of the lower House introduce some people to us who had had difficulty because of their hidden disability, and that's been a wonderful way of giving us lived-experience information to try to improve the way that we deal with hidden disabilities.

With the refurbishment of the Chambers, we upgraded the hearing loops in each of the Chambers as well. You will see now that we have closed captioning on a broadcast coming through. You yourself trialled some sign language on a committee side of things, and we're looking at how we can improve that as well. I did want to highlight that while the physical dimension to it is incredibly important—and probably one of the more challenging dimension to it—we do want to make sure that accessibility is not just in the physical space but across all ways that people can access this precinct and beyond.

While the Legislative Assembly is not a part of this hearing, I would say that does extend to access to electorate offices around the State as well. For many citizens of New South Wales, their experience of the Parliament is the experience of going to an electorate office, not coming here. So we want to make sure that the electorate offices are also a way that people can access the Parliament, and access it well. Strong accessibility standards are now built into all of our building works, including the electorate office work that we do as well. I could talk about this for ages, so I will pause there.

**The PRESIDENT:** Suffice it to say we are treating this very seriously.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Webb, for your comprehensive answer. We will now turn to questions from the Government.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Thank you all for attending this morning. In relation to MOPS, our staff, when do you expect that we might see the next annual determination handed down?

**The PRESIDENT:** It doesn't surprise me that the issue has come up. I might just give some preliminary comments first. Obviously the MOPS determination is often—in fact, is usually—handed down before the end of the financial year, which hasn't happened this year. It hasn't happened for a specific reason: that there is industrial action being taken by the PSA. Our view is that to have brought down the determination before that action is concluded, with potentially a different financial outcome after that determination is made, would be not appropriate for us to do. We are waiting for the conclusion of that. We hope to have that done, obviously—well, how long is a piece of string? We hope to have it done sooner rather than later. Once it is done, we would look to putting out the determination quickly. I should, though, mention at this point—so, imminently; once we know when the legal process is concluded.

I should make a couple of other comments, if I may, about what our plans are for the next determination because there will be—clearly pay is a significant focus for all staff, but there are a range of other conditions that also form part of that determination and I think it's appropriate for me to pre-empt some of those in this setting so that people know what we are considering. Firstly, there will be the provision for the newly determined PRT entitlements for LA crossbench members, which will be enacted. A process will be outlined to be followed before any effect is given to a decision to terminate the employment of staff. There will be express terms in the determination about State and Federal discrimination laws and State work health safety laws. There will be a new clause detailing the EAP assistance which is available to staff—which I'm happy to talk about later if people would like to know more—the ICO, and the workplace relations and safety support.

This will be, I suspect, of interest to staff. It also came up, from memory, in a supplementary question, possibly by Ms Boyd, last time about reasonable work hours. Currently we are planning to put out a revised hours of work clause which will describe reasonable work hours under the all incidence of employment allowance which staff receive and potentially—no, and the introduction of a time off in lieu opportunity for after people have worked excessive hours, which we think is important. We are also going to be matching public sector parental leave enhancements and updating the members code of conduct after both the recommendations from the Broderick review and the ICAC Keppel report. I guess the point is we are not just sitting doing nothing. We are focusing on a range of things that we think are going to be important to put in this determination. We will publish the determination, and the determination in terms of pay as well, as soon as it is practicable to do so after the Industrial Relations Commission has made its finding.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** The time off in lieu, which I'm pleased to hear is being considered—with regards to how you determine excessive hours, I know in my office we keep track of the hours that my excellent staffer Katie does, because she does a lot. Have you collected data to make sure that we are going to have a reasonable understanding of the actual hours that our staff currently do? How are we going to determine that?

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, it's a good question. There has been informal consultation, perhaps is a better way of putting it, at the moment, but Mr Webb might like to speak to this more specifically.

**MARK WEBB:** It's an excellent question. We're doing two things at the moment. The first is what is reasonable? That question has been kicked around. We'll be doing some consultation with people to just really narrow down what does that look like. But you're quite right. At the moment different officers do different things in terms of tracking hours. Some people do track their hours; some people don't track their hours. One of the things

we're having a look at is what support do we need to provide for members and their officers for people to be able to track those hours as an operation.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I guess I'm not so much worried about future tracking. I'm wondering how you're determining now. What data have you collected to inform your decision-making? Not what comes next; we can do that when that comes.

**The PRESIDENT:** We are currently trying to establish the framework and look at how this would work because we need to ensure that there's not an incredibly excessive cost to the Parliament, but it also has to provide appropriate support for the workers within this place as well. We haven't finalised that clause, Dr Kaine. I wanted to specifically state that today to make it clear that that's our intention, but we're continuing to discuss throughout the precinct, and I'm very happy to have those discussions with you.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I have some questions about the all incidence allowance and how it's being calculated currently. I wonder if this is perhaps not to you, President, but to Mr Webb or perhaps Ms Palmer. You mentioned that the payroll system is quite old and that we're moving to SAP, is that right, for payroll, or is that just HR?

**MARK WEBB:** No, it will be for finance as well. The current system is a very old version of SAP. We're in the process of determining what the right replacement would be. The modern SAP systems might be a sledgehammer to crack a walnut for us, so we're looking at a range of systems, but we would replace it, yes.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I'm sure you would be aware that with aged payroll systems across multiple organisations—in the real world outside of here—there have been issues with systems not coping with particular industrial instruments and inadvertently or otherwise resulting in underpayments to staff. Have we done anything to ensure that that old system doesn't inadvertently, for example, roll the incidence allowance into an hourly rate of pay that then results in an underpayment?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, you're quite right. These are issues that are across the whole community, especially with older systems. We have a few things in place to try to prevent things like that happening. I will not pretend that we've never made a mistake over the course of the years. There have been individual instances of people being both overpaid and underpaid.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** But you haven't done a systematic audit to make sure that there's not—

**MARK WEBB:** No, every year—annually—we do a systematic audit at the end of the financial year to reconcile the information that we have in our payroll system with the information we have in things like HR et cetera.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, but I think I've not stated my question right. In terms of an audit of the actual way that the system calculates, not so much that it calculates each individual's correctly. Of course mistakes can happen, but in terms of the actual way that it calculates.

**MARK WEBB:** We have had internal audits in the past that looked into issues like that. I'd have to take on notice when the last one of those was. I don't have that in my head, but it is something that we'd look at on a regular basis.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** This is in no way trying to be a gotcha moment, but in the process of trying to come up with the hours questions for the time off in lieu situation, we do think that we have identified a systematic underpayment issue with the payroll system with regard to the rolling up of that allowance into the hourly rate. We'll provide you with some information and you can then answer on supplementary questions.

**The PRESIDENT:** Please.

**MARK WEBB:** Absolutely, please. That would be great.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** I might come back to your answer, Mr President. I'm sure staff will appreciate those measures that you're looking at as part of the next determination, including an imminent wage increase, we hope. Any increase would be based on, I suppose, a base salary that is predicated on role descriptions and classification structures that probably don't align with the reality of the tasks being performed. Would you agree that that's perhaps a more structural and substantive issue with respect to MOP staff that needs to be addressed?

**The PRESIDENT:** The short answer is yes. The longer answer is we have a structure that was, in effect, developed 30, 40, 50 years ago with roles that were developed then. The world has changed in an extraordinary way. The expectation on staff—the requirements for engagement with everything from social media through to broad community organisations and activities—is, I suspect, substantially greater than it was. I agree with the fundamental premise. Obviously there has been some media about that earlier this year. I do think that it is

appropriate for the staff in the Parliament to have their roles—as reflects reality now—considered and determined, and that they be remunerated accordingly.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** I'm interested in the way forward with respect to that. With that being the case, would you agree that there are perhaps three distinct steps that would need to be undertaken to address the issue, the first being reviewing the role descriptions and classification structures; the second, aligning those new structures with analogous public sector grades; and then, thirdly, using that information or that analysis to inform any potential wage structure in a future determination? Would that be a methodical approach that you think would work?

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, I do. I think that sounds eminently sensible. Obviously there has already been some work done, which has been highlighted previously in this space, but I think that the clear opportunity now is pulling together a range of different strands and feedback into a potential consideration of the role requirements and the definitions, and subject that to consultation with members, staff, unions and so forth. Of course, this also needs to be done—I should make it very clear, and I'm sure you understand this totally, Mr Nanva—in conjunction with the Government as well. We need to ensure that if and when there are new roles and responsibility guidelines established for staff, if that does—and I suspect it will—ensure the likelihood of a pay reclassification, we need to ensure that the money is there to be able to do it. It is simply not fair on the staff to set expectations that are then unable to be met. We're considering a range of those things and what that would look like. We will also continue to discuss it with the Government but, in terms of the three-staged approach that you mention, those steps seem to me to be quite reasonable.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** If I could look at the first step—the reviewing of the role descriptions and classifications—the Bent review, I understand, has been undertaken or is undertaken. What's the status of the Bent review at the moment?

**MARK WEBB:** Sharon Bent, who I know is known to many people around the Parliament, did undertake some work in that space for us. She has given us some input coming out of that as well, which is a great starting point for the process that the President was outlining. As the President said, there's also feedback from lots of different sources as well, including things like the Broderick Review, for instance, which did make some comment on issues affecting this. What we're trying to do at the moment is pull all that together in a way that allows us to take the next steps moving forward and make sure that we're using all the information available for us moving forward.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Just to make sure that bad information isn't being fed in and producing a bad outcome if we're going to move forward on this, I think it's critical that new role descriptions and classifications are irrefutably accurate.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** I don't doubt the professionalism of Ms Bent at all or the conclusions that she has reached in the report—not by any means. But, to ensure it unambiguously captures the nature of these MOPS roles, I would have thought those newly drafted role descriptions and Ms Bent's analysis should probably be presented to staff, to relevant trade unions, to the PAG for their comprehensive feedback before we proceed to steps two and three.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mr Nanva—PAG?

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** The Parliamentary Advisory Group.

**MARK WEBB:** Which is on bullying harassment, sexual harassment.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** I suppose my question is, if there is a report, there are draft findings, draft role descriptions that we are going to rely on for future determinations—before we do anything with that, my view would have been that the staff should be consulted, trade unions should be consulted and the PAG should be consulted before we proceed any further. Is that a view you share?

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, that's clearly true. In terms of the specificities of the job description that Ms Bent provided, I think that is reasonable for that to be included in that consultation process. I would just make one pre-empting point now. There are a range of different responsibilities that a range of staff fill and we need to ensure that, when we determine job descriptions, they are reflective of what is actually done, i.e. that every single possible thing that could be done by a staff member isn't always—in fact, is mostly not—done by every staff member. So we need to work at a way through that. That's just a challenge. But, yes, I think that, when we pursue the consultation process of the sort that you outline, which is our intention as well, providing the suggested job descriptions or the information about job descriptions that Ms Bent provided, which I suspect won't be a final

landing place for everybody but will be extremely helpful because of the work that she has already done in formalising those conversations—then I think that is a reasonable thing.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Could I ask a quick follow-up on the determination? I accept your answer, President, about the industrial action of course needing—all of the good faith aspects of that as well. Given that I think in the last estimates Mr Webb had anticipated it would all be ready as per the normal schedule, I presume then that that would mean, once things are settled, there would be some consideration of back-paying staff for that period of time.

**The PRESIDENT:** Obviously, personally of course I would like that to be the case. Again, it will come down to the envelope of support and so forth, but that would be something that I would be hopeful for but I obviously can't commit to that at this point. The other point that I would just make, of which I think some people don't know, is that, while we will make this determination when we make it—let us assume, for the sake of argument, October or November—there is no reason why multiple determinations can't be made in a year and, if it becomes apparent that there needs to be something addressed further, it doesn't need then to wait for another year. That is something that we can look at as well.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I have a quick question to Mr Webb about security. I wanted to ask about telephones. I presume that what we do in security extends to our phone system.

**MARK WEBB:** Correct.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** But I understand that at the moment, if staff get phones redirected to, say, their mobile, it doesn't pick up the number of the caller, which in some cases can be problematic if you do need to screen out, for example, problematic callers for harassment reasons et cetera. I wondered if that is something that is being considered, if there is some way that the system could capture the number, particularly for staff who might be on the end of calls that they need to consider whether they take or not.

**MARK WEBB:** I'm pretty sure we could set that up. I know we did some consultation when we first set up the Voice over IP phone system, which is where those changes happen. I think its current setting could be based around some of that consultation, but I'm pretty sure from the technology point of view we can pass through numbers, so I'll go back and talk to the team. But I'm happy to look at that and if can do it. I can absolutely see your point. I myself may receive some phone calls occasionally that I would prefer not to take, so I do understand that point.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** You usually answer my calls.

**MARK WEBB:** Ninety per cent of the time, Mr Fang, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Webb. I'm informed that, because of the thoroughness of the answers, we now have about 11 and a half minutes for Opposition, crossbench and Government questions in this next session.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Mr President, the first thing I want to start with is a congratulations in relation to the issues that happened around the Hon. Bronnie Taylor's valedictory speech and the way that it was handled by the security staff, particularly the Special Constables and their leadership but also yourself, Mr President, and the team more widely. It was disappointing that somebody would try to ruin what was such a special day, but that leads to concerns around that issue more broadly. How do you think we can improve circumstances where there is somebody who's identified as harassing a member of Parliament, they turn up to the precinct, and they get to the point where they're actually seated in the gallery for what is a pretty significant speech by a member?

While I understand the Parliament is an open place and accessing democracy is widely important, but the concern is that so is members' security and the right to a workplace without harassment. That person had been previously identified and it was understood by security to be a problem, yet they were seated in the gallery not three or four minutes before the Hon. Bronnie Taylor was to give her valedictory speech. I don't think any member would feel that that is appropriate. How can we stop that occurring again?

**The PRESIDENT:** It's a great point. Thank you for your preliminary comments and also thank you for how you and others, including Ms Taylor, dealt with it on the day. It was a challenging situation and one that I think was resolved well. I'd like to just talk about some philosophical points to start with, if I may. The first is, as you rightly point out, that this is a parliament. It is the people's House. People should be able to come and observe the proceedings of this place. Because of its nature and because there is a range of different political views, there are going to be people who will come in and observe this place and who will disagree and potentially have had pre-existing interactions with some of the other members of Parliament.

My view is threefold. One, we must ensure that the actions that people take when they're in this place are observed and that how they act here is then responded to accordingly. For that gentleman and for others, when it's

been brought to our attention, or to the attention of the Special Constables, you would have seen that things then kick in and we watch very closely. If there is a reason—and I believe that was the case in a committee hearing previously with that gentleman—that they are acting inappropriately, then of course they should be excluded from the precinct. But excluding someone from the precinct is a big call when we're talking about a democratic institution, which, by its necessity, will have people disagreeing with you, often in a relatively heated way. But if that doesn't happen within this precinct, then I think that that's something that needs to be considered.

The second thing is on the day, I talked to the Clerk about this in some depth as well. I do think that there's a right for people to observe the democratic processes of the Parliament. Obviously, if there's an AVO or anything like that, that's a different matter entirely if there has been some tension with a particular member before. However, in reflecting on this issue with regard to the valedictory speech, or indeed an inaugural speech, I've come to the conclusion that they are in a totally different category, that they are not a critical part of the democratic processes in terms of legislation being passed in this place. If, for any reason, a member determines that they don't wish for someone to be in the gallery for either an inaugural speech or a valedictory speech, then I will ensure that they are not from this point on.

This is obviously the first time I've had to deal with this issue so that's why it took a little longer in terms of determinations being made, but that's how I intend to handle that situation from this point on for anyone who asks about that. But, Mr Fang, I guess it's the balance. It's the balance between ensuring we have an open and accessible and democratic Parliament, with ensuring that members and staff feel protected and that they are not exposed to threats. The moment that there is any potential risk we will ensure that there is particular focus given to individuals to ensure that there is no risk to employees in this place.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Thank you for that. What would occur in circumstances where there has been repeated abuse and a person who has a fixation, I'll say, on a member of Parliament, where perhaps an AVO may not be granted but there is certainly a perceived risk that's been highlighted to a special constable of the police? Where do we find that threshold? You covered off about the issue a little bit in your answer but where is the threshold where somebody is potentially going to be excluded from the precinct? Have we determined that yet? Because I think there are a number of members who are concerned.

**The PRESIDENT:** This is a very valid line of questioning. This is a moveable situation, and obviously each situation and each individual will be determined on its own merits. That's the first point. I don't think there is a blanket rule for everything. In terms of the second issue, I think that a person—my instinct is twofold. One, obviously if there's any legal reason for a person to be excluded from the building, they obviously will be if there is an AVO or a personal protection order or any of those things. Obviously if that's brought to our attention—we don't necessarily know that, by the way, immediately, so that's helpful to know if it happens. Clearly if there's a legal reason for excluding them because of previous behaviour, then that will immediately happen.

In terms of the second, my current default setting is that, in the absence of other information, it is how they act within the precinct. If they are acting in a threatening or inappropriate way in here then action will be taken. If they are not—even if they have had some tension and some history—this place is a robust, democratic institution. There will be members of the public who are interested and engaged in the political processes, who have deep involvement and engagement, sometimes in a negative way, with members of Parliament. My instinct is always to have an open institution and a democratic institution, but to ensure that that's balanced. So that's probably not providing an answer that you're necessarily looking for, but, I think, starting from a default setting of saying, "One, if there is a legal reason for people to be excluded then they will be. Two, if they do come into the precinct, and we're alerted to concern, then we will keep a very close eye on them, and if there is activity that is inappropriate, then they'll be removed."

**DAVID BLUNT:** If I could add something very briefly, Mr Latham asked earlier about the security review that we're having conducted. I had an opportunity to look at the terms of reference yesterday and provide a little bit of input and a specific point that I asked to be added was for the latest advice on dealing with fixated persons, for all the reasons that you've asked the question and for all the reasons that the President has given the answer that he's given.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I also quickly just make this point: If anybody does have concerns about individuals—of anybody in this precinct—please advise security so that they know. Obviously forewarned is very important in this sort of situation.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** The last point I want to tackle, and I note this will probably be my last question in relation to this session. Is it likely that you're prepared to consider the member themselves that's progressing their concern? For example, my threshold is probably going to be higher than another member's.

**The PRESIDENT:** Different to others, of course.



**The Hon. WES FANG:** I certainly can take the robustness. I will give it; I can take it. That's part of my nature. But I know that some of my other friends and colleagues in this place are not, perhaps, as robust. There is concern that the threshold is the same for all members, whereas perhaps the threshold needs to be varied, depending on who the member is and how uncomfortable they may feel. For example, some females might feel more threatened by somebody than I would be, just because of society and the way that those interactions occur. Is that going to be considered in the view that's taken by security and yourself?

**The PRESIDENT:** It was clear that Mrs Taylor, for example, was extremely agitated about the presence of that gentleman, and that certainly was something, at the time, that I took into account when making the initial determination to have him removed from the Chamber and then, as I thought about it more deeply, to have that broader set of principles about inaugural and valedictory speeches, which I made. In terms of your comment, the comment is valid. The premise is valid. It's difficult to do that. I guess the only thing that I can say is that these matters need to be determined on a case-by-case basis, but if there are specific reasons to individuals that would make decisions in these matters or that would be of assistance in helping me and others come to decisions in these matters, then it's always helpful to know them. I'm always open to considering all individual circumstances of all members in trying to make this place safe and equitable for everyone.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** With the work of the complaints officer, have we overcome the problem where you can only make a complaint if you've got a protected characteristic under the Anti-Discrimination Act?

**The PRESIDENT:** I think I made my views pretty clear on this last time. Anyone can make a complaint about bullying, and I strongly reinforce the comments that I made last time, which is, if anybody in this precinct feels that they are being either bullied or harassed or discriminated against, then they should raise that issue accordingly.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Is that now the system that the complaints officer is administering?

**The PRESIDENT:** There's currently, as you know, a review undergoing into the ICO, and I would assume that these sorts of issues are being considered in that review by both Houses—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** So it's not the state of play at the moment, subject to the review?

**The PRESIDENT:** That would be my assumption, but I might throw to Mr Webb or Mr Blunt if either of them have any extra information on this.

**DAVID BLUNT:** If I could make three comments in response to your question. Number one, the Privileges Committee, as I understand it, has adopted a report in relation to its review of the ICO, and I think I'm receiving that report on Monday, so we'll know the outcome of that review. Number two, can I commend the RISE training, which is being delivered at the moment by a fabulous provider, Felicity Menzies. I undertook the stage two of the RISE training last week, together with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and she explained this issue in very clear terms, in terms of the distinction, at law, between bullying and harassment. Clearly, any person can be the victim of bullying and it's appropriate for any person to make a complaint if they have been bullied.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** But is this reflected in the work of the complaints officer?

**DAVID BLUNT:** I'm coming to that. But that harassment at law is different. That harassment is about conduct that is directed at you because you are part—it's because of your characteristics in terms of one of the defined groups, so there is a distinction there. In terms of whether that distinction is being clearly adopted by the Independent Complaints Officer, Ms Menzies' presentation reflects the new policy on bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct that is about to be released. That has been agreed by the Parliamentary Executive Group. I don't want to steal anyone else's thunder on this issue, but watch this space. That will be promulgated very soon.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I don't know who Ms Menzies is, but I know the matter that I have been dealing with. When did the complaints officer start work?

**The PRESIDENT:** I don't know. Do you know?

**DAVID BLUNT:** She was appointed two years ago.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Is it true to say for the first two years of her work that you can't make a complaint if you are a straight white male with two legs?

**The PRESIDENT:** No, that's—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That was the experience I had.

**The PRESIDENT:** I defer to Mr Blunt's comments previously about the legal definition of harassment, but that anybody can make a complaint about bullying.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I'm not asking about some lawyer's interpretation. I'm asking does our complaints officer accept complaints from everyone in this Parliament regardless of their personal characteristics?

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** She does?

**The PRESIDENT:** I would hope so. Absolutely.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Well, why didn't it happen in my case?

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Blunt?

**DAVID BLUNT:** I would just add that the Independent Complaints Officer has been appointed in accordance with the terms of the resolution adopted by both Houses. She operates under the terms of that resolution. When she was appointed, her first piece of work, which she was required by those resolutions to undertake, was the provision of a protocol for dealing with investigations. That was considered by each of the privileges committees and endorsed by those committees. She has been operating under the terms of the resolution and utilising that protocol. My understanding of the matter that you are referring to is that she has sought to apply perhaps an earlier version of the Parliament's policy that is about to be released. I think once that policy is released, this matter will be very clear, and that's happening very soon.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Isn't the bureaucratic process beautiful? Can I ask why we spent \$22 million replacing the roof membrane but there are still leaks? Not the sort of leak you normally get in a parliament, but watertight leaks into the office of my colleague the Hon. Rod Roberts, your Deputy President—

**The PRESIDENT:** My excellent Deputy President.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Excellent, absolutely—on the eleventh floor.

**The PRESIDENT:** I might throw to Mr Webb on this one.

**MARK WEBB:** The leak in the Deputy President's office is not to do with the membrane at all. The pebbled concrete side of the building is 40-something years old. We have found—my building team will be very cranky with me because I'm not using the exact terminology. But, essentially, the grout between those blocks has degraded. What we have found is that when the rain comes in from a particular direction, it was getting through that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Sideways?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, sideways and into his office. Some of you might have seen people abseiling down the side of the building throughout the course of this week. They were there to fix that. As I understand it, that issue for Mr Roberts is now fixed. I will say, though, you have raised these matters in other forums, Mr Latham. We did undertake a review of the roof as well to see if there were any issues up there.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** How is that going?

**MARK WEBB:** We have found an issue. You might recall there was a crane up on the roof when we were doing—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I've got no idea what's on the roof. My head is normally down, doing work. I don't think you expect MPs to be wandering around the roof or abseiling.

**MARK WEBB:** That's fair enough. When we were doing the work up there we craned a crane up there and then used that to bring stuff up and down. We found a spot on the roof where the crane was taken down again that might have caused some damage. That is under warranty and people are up there fixing that at the moment. That wasn't to do with Mr Roberts' office, but we put a temporary fix in place and they are doing the permanent fix at the moment. That's under warranty and people are up there fixing that at the moment. That wasn't to do with Mr Roberts's office, but we put a temporary fix in place and they're doing the permanent fix at the moment.

That was an issue under warranty, which happens with major building works. We do appreciate you raising the issues both in this and other forums. We are always looking for ways to improve that kind of leaking in the building. Those of you who have been around for a while will remember that whenever it rained, we had to put buckets under the skylight to catch water. With the replacement of the skylight, we fixed that. You might also recall there was some leaking in the Jubilee Room. That came when we had big deluges that came through. That's now fixed as well. The last point I will make on this is that, unfortunately, when we make fixes, we can't replicate

a deluge to test them. When we get a huge amount of water in a short period of time, we don't have any way of replicating that as a test, so we sometimes have to wait for the next deluge before we can see whether what we did worked or not.

Those of you who have worked with water will know that water finds a way. You fix one thing and then it gets into the next thing. We're constantly looking for ways to better waterproof the building. As I said before, the building is seven separate buildings. Probably the issue where we have the biggest problems are the joins between the two buildings. For instance, we know there has been an ongoing issue in the join between the Fountain Court and the tower block because they are two separate buildings that lean up against each other. We are constantly looking at ways to improve that side of things. But you are quite right in saying that when we make a major investment in infrastructure improvement, we need to make sure that that investment is working in the way that it is meant to. That's why we are fixing these issues under warranty with the builder at the moment.

**DAVID BLUNT:** Mr Chair, if I could add one point in relation to the incident in the Deputy President's office with the suspected horizontal entry of the water. My understanding is that that happened exactly two weeks ago. I was away in regional New South Wales that evening, so unfortunately I wasn't there, but I was watching on television my beloved Parramatta Eels play at the Sydney Football Stadium that evening under that much water. It was an extraordinary rain event.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Latham, I was there and I can guarantee that it was an extraordinary rain event.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** You were at Allianz Stadium watching footy?

**The PRESIDENT:** I was.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Wonders never cease.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Mr President, in the last estimates I asked you about the lobbyist passes and was told that that was part of a new review into the passes system. Is that part of the security review or is that a different one?

**The PRESIDENT:** No. I'm not sure if you were here when I talked about the security passes issue before. We have done a review of the security passes. We have disabled all of those that are out of commission. We have restricted lots of them, including numbers of potential lobbyists, back to 7.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. Monday to Friday only. There is the security group, which consists of—

**MARK WEBB:** The usher, the serjeant, the head of security and various others as needed.

**The PRESIDENT:** They are making further recommendations about the pass issue. My suspicion is that that will be considered there.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** One of the questions I raised last time was around how we had this unknown group of lobbyists that had the same colour pass as our special constables and a whole bunch of other people, so it wasn't possible to tell who they were when they were walking around the building. Is that something that's going to be addressed?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, you are quite right. You raised that last time. Yes, they are called authorised visitor passes and pretty much everyone who is an authorised visitor has them. One of the issues we found in the review we've done so far is that when a member signs off saying that this person gets an authorised visitor pass, we don't ask the question of who they are. We ask who they are from a name point of view, but we don't ask what their job is or what their purpose in using and getting a pass would be. So the ability to differentiate them between different categories becomes impossible. Our focus in the short term was making sure we cut down the number of passes and we restricted the time period. Now that that's done, we're doing further work to see if there are changes we can make to the application process that would give us more information to be able to differentiate some of those different categories moving forward.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Then, hopefully, one day publish it so that we can actually see who has a lobbyist pass.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, who has and who doesn't.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I understand that there has been a move of staff between departments within Parliament. For example, Hansard used to sit under the Clerk and it is now under you, Mr Webb, or that there have been some changes.

**MARK WEBB:** Ages ago.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can you talk us through how that works?

**MARK WEBB:** Hansard came into the Department of Parliamentary Services in 2010, I think it was, so a long time ago.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That was a long time ago, so maybe it's not them.

**MARK WEBB:** But you're quite right. DPS was created in 2008. In the first few years there was a steady stream of activities that were moved across. That was when Hansard came across as well. Most recently the only change in function moving across was that the management of the physical electorate offices came across from the department of the LA to us. That has been the only movement of function across, but we do have staff moving between the departments on a regular basis for secondments and things like that. In fact, we had the DPS staff awards a couple of days ago, and a member of Mr Blunt's team, who had come over to work on the system that Mr Latham asked about earlier, was the winner of the DPS Integrity Award for the work that she did while she was on secondment over to us.

**DAVID BLUNT:** That is Christine Thai, an absolutely outstanding officer of whom we're very proud.

**MARK WEBB:** Very well deserved. So there is a movement of staff but not function unless—as I say, the electorate office thing was a move of function.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you for clarifying. When it comes to the numbers of staff who are permanent versus those who are on a form of contract, do you have the numbers for that and, particularly, are there trends over time? Are we getting increasing numbers of permanent people or reducing numbers of permanent people?

**MARK WEBB:** Increasing numbers of permanent—sorry.

**The PRESIDENT:** No, please.

**MARK WEBB:** That is my ego; I just jumped straight into the question. We have increasing numbers of permanent people, but there are some areas where we get temporary money where we have to take on temporary staff. For instance, with our Hansard team, as an example, we have some permanent money and we have a lot of permanent staff, but we also have some temporary staff because we've got temporary money. The other area where we have varying numbers of temporary staff is in those demand-driven functions. For instance, catering in the last few years has gone from around 20 permanent staff to 25, so we have increased the permanent number but, for instance, when we have big functions on, we use agency staff to come in and support those big functions.

Similarly, when we have people sick in the cleaning team or go on long-term leave, we bring in temporary people. At the moment it's about 20 permanent staff and nine agency staff there. It varies up and down. As people retire, we use a temporary person until we can run a recruitment action and then people come back out again. Probably the other area where this happens a bit is in the AVB team. We have a core team of audiovisual people—the excellent team that is managing the audiovisual of today's program. But we also have a casual pool because we do have events and functions and the like coming through.

I would mention, in the context of Hansard, one of the enhancements we are looking at making for the Hansard service is building a casual pool of people who are able to come in when we have peaks of work come through. A lot of focus in previous estimates, with the amount of committee activity going on, has been on the impact on the Clerk's team, as it should be, but there is also a fairly big impact on Hansard as well. We have looked at creating a casual pool so that if we have a very high level of committee activity—and now that the LA is sitting on some Fridays as well, that can exacerbate some of those issues—we can tap into that casual pool as well to deal with peaks. Pretty much, where we have large concentrations of temporary staff it is either because we have temporary money or we need a casual pool to deal with peaks of activity. But we have an ongoing commitment to permanent employment for people. We are always advocating to try and set that standard in place.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Thank you for coming along and giving evidence today. I've got a bunch of questions I want to start with in relation to committees, which may be best directed to the Clerk or to Mr Webb. You may well want to take some of these on notice. How many active committee inquiries have there been each month, conducted by the Upper House, since 1995?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Just off the top of your head.

**The PRESIDENT:** I'll throw to Mr Blunt on that one.

**The CHAIR:** My money is he can answer it.

**DAVID BLUNT:** I do have a long memory, and I am passionate about the Legislative Council committee system, but you've stumped me there. I will have to take that on notice. We'll see what we can do.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** While you're doing that, another question I had was how many full-time equivalent staff are employed by the LC in order to facilitate committee work each month—I don't know if you do it on that basis; maybe it's an annual basis—since 1995? I'm just looking as to whether there has been an increase in the number of staff and an increase in the number of committee inquiries. Over the past 30 years, has that committee work increased?

**DAVID BLUNT:** Absolutely. I'll see what I can do on notice to answer your specific question. I very much doubt we'll be able to break it down on a month-by-month basis, either for committee inquiries or staff numbers, but we'll see what we can do on an annual basis. Having been a parliamentary officer since 1990 and an officer of the Legislative Council since late 1995—originally as a committee secretary—I have direct experience of the exponential growth in the volume of committee inquiries and the shorter time frames for most inquiries.

Back when I started as a committee secretary, it was not uncommon for there to be maybe five or six active inquiries at a time across the entire committee system, and most of those would be 12-month-long or sometimes even two-year-long inquiries into public policy issues. Of course, we still have some of that public policy work undertaken by committees, such as the one that Dr Kaine chairs, but, increasingly, the committee system has evolved to be just as concerned—or perhaps even more concerned—with accountability-oriented inquiries and holding the Executive Government to account, which is absolutely appropriate. They tend to be shorter inquiries and far more of them.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** If the number of staff has increased and the total number of committees and the work those committees are doing has increased, then, naturally, there'd be more work for members of the LC in dealing with those committees, wouldn't there?

**The PRESIDENT:** Absolutely. Can I make a quick point, Mr Blunt? Between 2022-23 and 2023-24, there were 525 submissions received by committees in 2022-23, and there were 7,700 in 2023-24, noting that birth trauma received 4,000 of them. Still, it's a significant rise. In 2022-23, there were 84 hearings; in 2023-24, there were 139 hearings. That obviously has a significant workload on the committee staff, but also on members.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Given that you've raised birth trauma, there were 4,000 submissions. On my reading of it, 1,480 of those were substantial submissions. When I looked at the timeline of that committee, you had a period from the formation of the committee, or the resolution of the House, until the first hearing of only 60 days. Do you think upper House members are adequately resourced in terms of staff, reading that number of submissions? If you go from the close of submissions to the first hearing date, you've got a period of only 20 days to trawl through 1,480 submissions. Even if you were to task one staff member to read them and summarise them for you, I don't know how somebody could get that done in that short time frame.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Blunt may have further comments, but I'll just make two quick comments. Firstly, it's obviously within the purview of any committee to determine if it requires an extension in terms of timing. An overwhelming number of submissions, I would have thought, would be a very good reason to do that. Secondly, in terms of staffing in members' offices, it's an excellent point, Mr Murphy. If you or others wish to make a submission to the PRT, using evidence such as this in order to argue for a second or subsequent staffers for MLCs' offices, the Presiding Officers would not be opposed to that. I'll throw to Mr Blunt, if he has anything further to add.

**DAVID BLUNT:** In relation to the particular inquiry you're talking about, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the work of the outstanding staff in the secretariat on supporting that inquiry. It was extremely demanding. The material was complex. The impact of the inquiry was also very significant. We've seen other jurisdictions in other parts of the world approaching the same policy issue referring to the work of the Legislative Council committee as being the impetus to that. Just yesterday, I received the Government response—a very comprehensive Government response—to that inquiry. So that work is making a real difference. The Committee Office has expanded from approximately 19 full-time equivalent staff in 2018 to 37 full-time equivalent in that six-year period.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** In relation to that, has any consideration been given to, for example, moving to a relief staff budget? If you have a period where you've got a particular committee, like that select committee, that has an enormous amount of work, you could, for example, utilise a relief staff budget. If you're an office like mine where my staffing role is split three days a week to two days a week between two different people, you could utilise that budget to put a second person on to deal with some of that work. Has any consideration been given to moving a relief staff budget?

**The PRESIDENT:** For members?

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Yes, for members' staff.

**The PRESIDENT:** Again, that would be something that would need to be an instruction of the PRT, which would then obviously be enacted.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** At the moment, there's no budget for a handover between the two staff I have on those days and there's no ability, when you've got peak demand periods—if you can call them that—of committee work or something else, to utilise a budget. One staff member has to go off in order for the other person to come on at the moment.

**MARK WEBB:** The issue around flexibility of staffing for members to deal with peak issues is one that I have been looking at quite a lot over the last few years. I started by engaging with the PRT around emergency situations. Things like the floods, fires and COVID, indeed, created real workload demands on members and, in some cases, continue to. The aftermath, for instance, of the floods in Lismore continues to create extra demand there. The PRT was open to the idea under those circumstances and so has granted me authority in that space. More recently I've started to think about issues other than emergency situations. For instance, I often get a request from a member saying, "A long-term staff member of mine is about to retire. I'm bringing a new person in. I would really love a week where there could be a bit of crossover, where the person who has been in my office for a long time could teach the new person how to do things." But a strict interpretation of the PRT determination would say, "No, you can't do that." The person ends on Friday; the new person starts on Monday. I've started a process of engaging with the PRT to extend that flexibility to look at those kinds of requests. I consider them to be work health and safety and operational requests. I had not thought about the issue of peak load that comes from other sources. I'll say up-front I hadn't thought about that.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** You will consider it?

**MARK WEBB:** I now will now consider it. It is a reasonable point. I'd have to think it through, because I'm sure the PRT would ask me, "What would be your criteria for judging that this would happen?" I'd have to think through that. But that concept, I think, is a good one and one that I have been—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Can we just add to that as well? You've spoken about long-term members leaving, but that applies to staff going on leave. You might not need the length of the handover, but a day for a new staff member to understand what they're coming into. Could you consider that as well?

**MARK WEBB:** It could make a huge difference. I agree.

**The PRESIDENT:** This is perfectly valid.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** I have one security question. We had a recent security briefing that members of the Parliament generally were invited to. I don't want to go into the detail of that, other than just one issue that came up, which was one aspect of the advice was that members should take staff members with them when they go out to public events so that there's a second person there that can contact police or defuse a situation or deal with an emergency. Given we've only got the one staff member in the upper House, I just wanted to know whether you've come up with any, or are considering any, alternative measures for members of the upper House to provide for their security. We don't have the budget to take staff with us when we're going on trips regionally. To take them with us to every event we go to would result in closure of the office. Are there any other alternatives being considered?

**The PRESIDENT:** I'll throw to Mr Webb, but one of the things that was discussed at the end of that briefing was the new duress alarm, which is being trialled on people's phones as an app for members of Parliament to be able to literally alert security, which will then photograph, record and act on immediate threats, which is the sort of system that I think will be particularly helpful if a member of Parliament is there by themselves.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Evidence in the trial after the event?

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Webb might have more comments. I just should make the comment that if there is an issue, police will be immediately dispatched.

**MARK WEBB:** I would just add to that. The President mentioned before that if you were contemplating your future submissions to the PRT in terms of staffing to take into account the issues of workload, the Parliament has success in the past in making cases around work health and safety, and safety more broadly. The reason there are three electorate officers in electorate offices rather than the two that there used to be was primarily a safety argument that was made. I think that could form part of that. I won't go into too much. As long-term members of the Committee will know, I'm reluctant sometimes to speak about security measures on the public record because it gives people information about what our security measures are. But I would just mention one extra option that's available that some members use, which is to call extension 2600, or the full number if you're outside, and have a special constable on the line with you when you are moving through a situation that you're concerned about.

For instance, I was talking to one member who was going to community events. They would finish late at night. Their concern was not the community event itself; it was getting from the community event back to their car. One of the things we recommended for them was they ring the special constables and they just have a chat to the special constable in the five minutes it takes them to walk to their car. But it means if something happens, there is somebody on the line. As you know, the special constables are connected into the police network. They are able to dispatch a car in the local area immediately if something was to happen. We're looking at techniques like that that can help enhance people's individual security while perhaps the broader issues of resourcing are considered. I am very conscious that the PRT is an excellent, independent process, but it moves very slowly, and so we do want to come up with ways in which we can enhance security.

We talked about security before. I did want to say that I don't want anyone to feel that because we're doing this comprehensive security review, we're holding off on making any security enhancements until we see the review come through. The distress app is a good example of the things that the excellent team—Anthony Macvean and his team are doing excellent work trying to find ways of enhancing security in little ways and big ways all the time. If there is a particular issue that you're concerned about, please come and talk to us about it because we will continue to try to find solutions even while those bigger processes are going on. Chair, I did have a couple of answers to things people asked through the course of this morning's session which I could give very rapidly or wait until after the break.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe after the break, Mr Webb. We have run 10 minutes over time, so I'm proposing that we reconvene at 11.20 a.m. to give us time to have a little bit of a break. Thank you, everyone, for your excellent questions and the civility of the morning session.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, everyone, for returning in good order. We will now recommence with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I might go back to the SO 52s that we were talking about, if that is okay, Mr Blunt. What are the impediments to electronic returns of SO 52s? We heard at the Premier's estimates that there were some security concerns. Could you run us through what some of those impediments are?

**DAVID BLUNT:** Absolutely. I'm very happy to do so, Mr Rath. As I was saying before, the Department of the Legislative Council and the Cabinet Office have been collaborating to find some solutions as to how this can be done efficiently and safely. We have been collaborating for some time on this in order to try to realise the efficiencies that are out there. The work to date has focused on the development of a system by which the Cabinet Office can upload returns to order and they can be received by the Department of the Legislative Council. However, to make that operational, security and accessibility build-ins need to be added. They need to reflect the content of Standing Order 52, which now includes three categories of documents—not just public and privileged, but also documents that should remain confidential because they contain personal information. They also need to address privacy concerns that are of significant concern to government agencies, and also increasing cybersecurity concerns.

If I can just take you to some recent steps that have taken place, in November 2022 the Procedure Committee reported on its inquiry into Standing Order 52. Chapter 4 of that report describes the purpose and then status of what we call the e-returns project—this project to provide for the electronic lodgement of returns to order. Importantly, the committee made two recommendations and proposed a draft resolution for consideration by the House early in this fifty-eighth term of Parliament. The purpose of including a draft resolution was to make clear that the project has the necessary political support, including high-level commitment from the Government for the final resource-intensive stage of the project to be proceeded with. The draft resolution also sought to resolve, by way of the clear intention of the House, a number of issues or options to address those security and accessibility issues.

Finally, that report of the Procedure Committee suggested a fresh look at this issue by the Procedure Committee early in this parliamentary term. That hasn't happened yet. The Procedure Committee has had quite a full workload, including three inquiries that it reported on recently, dealing with the lodgement of notices of motions, the use of language in the Chamber and—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Committees.

**DAVID BLUNT:** —disorder in committees, that's right. The Procedure Committee hasn't commenced looking at Standing Order 52. There are a couple of other things to note, though. Since that report, I've had an exchange of correspondence with the Secretary of the Cabinet Office, in which she very helpfully expressed the Cabinet Office's preference in relation to some of the accessibility and security issues that were highlighted by the Procedure Committee. That was really helpful. She also raised some additional privacy and cybersecurity concerns

and flagged undertaking a "privacy and cybersecurity risk assessment of the project". I responded, indicating my preparedness and that of the Department of the Legislative Council to cooperate with that to address any required privacy and security measures in the final design for the project. I also note that the volume of returns to order has returned to more normal levels in this term of Parliament.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** We're being more targeted in our approach.

**DAVID BLUNT:** Although, we are seeing a large number of separate returns to order. For every order for papers we're often getting two or three separate returns, with the documents coming back in a staggered way, which imposes some additional administrative burdens. We've also seen the Government table a protocol for the proactive release of government information to members. Finally, I note that the Secretary of the Premier's Department recently wrote to me, and that correspondence was tabled in the House, expressing some serious concerns on behalf of government agencies about orders for papers requiring the disclosure and hence publication of sensitive personal information of public servants.

I understand he's met with a range of members of the House to discuss that matter and has requested some self-restraint by the House in this regard. Although this hasn't been explicitly stated to me by the Cabinet Office, I do suspect that the ultimate level of enthusiasm from government agencies for e-returns is likely to be related to how those concerns are addressed over time. Finally, once all those issues have been addressed, I still need to internally participate in a whole-of-Parliament process to see work on e-returns prioritised as part of the digital transformation project. That involves a consensus-based decision-making process where there are a range of meritorious IT projects and we have to work out which are to be prioritised.

I also just point out that over the next financial year much of our resources in this area—not only financial but most importantly the people resources, because there's a limited number of people who have the skills and experience to develop parliamentary information systems—a key priority for the people and the funding will be developing and building the new online searchable pecuniary interest register, which is required under the draft regulation that has been considered by the Privileges Committee recently.

For all those reasons, we're unlikely to be able to move to that final stage of development of e-returns until probably this time next year. But, as I said before, that's probably not unhelpful because with IT systems developing so rapidly, it may be that there are some alternative solutions to how we address those accessibility and confidentiality security requirements that may well become evident through newly developing systems.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I think the issue of the IT systems, which has been raised for many years, is an ongoing point. I suppose the new information that you mentioned in your response just then was it's not just a matter of IT. It's also, even if we have the systems and the funding and we're able to do it, do we want to do it, because of the cybersecurity concerns and the issue that the Cabinet secretary raised in terms of people being able to piece together thousands and thousands of pages of returns and, in the wrong hands, that could be problematic. Has any consideration been given to, if not putting online every return for the entire public to see, then at the very least on SharePoint, for instance, for members and maybe even members' staff so we could look at it electronically rather than coming down to your office and taking a look at the documents?

At the moment, it seems almost an absurdity that the Cabinet Office will print thousands of pages, send it over to your office, then we go and look at them. So that we can share it, we then scan all of those pages and send a link around to our staff or other interested parties so they can take a look at it—on the non-privileged documents. I completely understand that with the privileged documents you couldn't possibly put those up online. Is that something that could be looked at in terms of, at the very least, members and maybe members' staff being able to access the public documents electronically?

**DAVID BLUNT:** For all the reasons that you've just been outlining, that's exactly why we continue to be enthusiastic about the project, as does the Cabinet Office. Yes, those options can be, and will be, considered. It's interesting that you mention SharePoint. That provides some interesting opportunities for us—as members, I hope, are experiencing the benefits of. Thanks in part to some representations that Mr Murphy made some time ago, we have ourselves developed, with the rollout of SharePoint, a members' hub via which you can access all the information you need for your participation in committee inquiries. SharePoint is certainly something that I'm sure will be considered going forward. Just in terms of the comment you made about the threshold question about whether this is ultimately adopted or embraced or not, that's exactly why the Procedure Committee proposed that the House consider a resolution in this term of Parliament that would provide the firm basis of the decision to proceed and would reflect commitment from all parties to doing this.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Thank you so much for that information. We might pursue it again next estimates and see where it's up to. Following on from the questions raised by Mr Murphy, when it comes to parliamentary entitlements—whether it's pay, whether it's entitlements we get as MPs, whether it's staff—I'm



trying to understand a little bit more what role the PRT has and the decisions that they make versus the Parliament, and you and the Speaker as the Presiding Officers and also the Executive Government, and how that all interacts. I know this is a broad question, but sometimes in my discussions with the PRT they might say, "Well, this is a matter for the Parliament," or, "This is a matter for the Presiding Officers." Then sometimes you might say to us, "Well, that's a matter for the PRT." They obviously determine the increase in their determination year on year on things like entitlements, but in terms of restructuring or changing the entitlements structure on something, for instance, like the electoral allowance, is that a decision they make or do they make recommendations to you and then it's for us to consider?

**The PRESIDENT:** I'll throw to Mr Webb shortly, but the fundamental answer is that they issue a determination, which we are obliged to follow. However, we then determine how that determination will be implemented, in effect. That does give us some discretion, and it does give Mr Webb some discretion in terms of dealing with some of the issues that have been raised earlier in this hearing. But, fundamentally, we can't just arbitrarily declare that Mr Murphy will have seven extra staff in his office.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** You can!

**The PRESIDENT:** When they say this is something for the Parliament to deal with, potentially there are other issues that actually need to be legislated, for example, which is why they would say that. But Mr Webb might be able to give further clarity.

**MARK WEBB:** That's an excellent summary. To give an example, for clarity, the PRT determines how many staff you all get, but the Presiding Officers' annual determination determines the salary of those positions, just to give an example there. I administer the entitlement system, not under delegation from the Presiding Officers but in my own right. As you would imagine, there would be a natural conflict of interest for a Presiding Officer, who is also a member, having oversight of some of the administration, so a lot of that I administer in my own right. Where we identify issues, we put an annual submission into the PRT as well where we've identified the issues that might be causing difficulties with that administration going through. But we are absolutely bound to follow the—if the PRT says something is a certain way, we are bound to follow that. We can't, say, decide that it's not a certain way.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** What if there was no determination on a certain issue? Say that we decided as a Parliament to change the system in some way. Could we do that or are they the sole determinant? So we're not contradicting any determination they have made; we've proactively decided we want to do something new in terms of entitlements or staff, but it doesn't necessarily go against any of their determinations.

**MARK WEBB:** My understanding of the enabling legislation that grants the PRT its powers is that we could not introduce, say, a new entitlement ourselves; it would have to be a submission to the PRT. We couldn't decide that there's—the issue we were talking about before in terms of peak workloads, for instance, I couldn't arbitrarily decide, yes, we're going to introduce a new thing that is an entitlement for a member that is not covered by the PRT. But, of course, it depends a little bit on the issue itself. I also have obligations under the work health and safety legislation, for instance, and other sides of things. In some of those work health and safety situations, I, for instance, started providing additional relief to people going through emergency crisis, like the floods, fires et cetera, in advance of the PRT making a final ruling there because I felt that my obligations under the work health and safety legislation trumped other things. So there can be situations where there is a different, competing legislative, and I have to make a judgement there.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Sometimes it's a bit confusing. Even on MPs' pay, for instance, that was a decision made by the Parliament to freeze the pay of members. It wasn't a PRT decision—

**MARK WEBB:** No.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** —which is why it's sometimes confusing.

**The PRESIDENT:** But then the PRT was obliged to follow the decision of the Parliament.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Yes. That's why I'm saying if on other entitlements we made similar things—increases, decreases, freezes, whatever—how does that interact with the PRT? It is a bit complicated in our meetings that we have with the PRT in terms of who does what exactly.

**MARK WEBB:** Obviously, legislative instruments—so the actual legislation itself or relevant regulation that's created—

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** That trumps the PRT?

**MARK WEBB:** That would trump—so in the particular case of the wage freeze, that was done by means, if I remember correctly, of—

**DAVID BLUNT:** I think by legislation.

**MARK WEBB:** Legislation? Yes. So then the PRT was obliged to follow that legislative framework. I couldn't, as a bureaucrat, arbitrarily decide to do something extra on top of what the PRT did, but I could make a submission either asking the PRT to look at it or, through the Presiding Officers, I could make a submission to say, "Is there a legislative or regulatory or some other mechanism that you would like to use in this particular space?" but it couldn't be arbitrary. Mr Blunt?

**DAVID BLUNT:** If I can just give an example, the former Presiding Officers during the last Parliament were quite keen to see the PRT consider the establishment of an arrangement for a separation severance payment, if you like—an adjustment payment for MPs whose terms came to an end, not through their own choosing, which applies in many other parliaments.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Federally, yes.

**DAVID BLUNT:** The Australian Parliament—

**MARK WEBB:** Victoria.

**DAVID BLUNT:** —I think some other State parliaments and so on, and for very good reasons. Some former MPs find it terribly difficult to find new employment and get back on their feet at the end of their parliamentary careers. Ultimately, the advice that came back was that it was out of scope for the PRT to consider that matter. It would require a change to the Parliamentary Remuneration Act to authorise the PRT to consider entitlements for former members, so that didn't proceed.

**The CHAIR:** I have one question that relates to public safety at the front of the building. It's a unique workplace. Often there are protests. They're ad hoc, they happen quite quickly and they happen on the footpath. With the larger protests, I'm sure the police are informed and the police are present. With smaller protests, I've often seen PAs set up and a small group of protesters—50 or 60 or 100—and I've attended those protests.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Shock, horror!

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** You organised it.

**The CHAIR:** I don't organise them; I just attend them.

**The PRESIDENT:** You just wave the odd flag, Mr Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Just the odd flag. Who is in charge of the footpath? On Wednesday this week there was a small protest. Members of the public travelling south along Macquarie Street are travelling along before the police arrive. To avoid the protest or a group of people, they're stepping off the footpath onto the road and, in one instance, I thought there was a relatively close call. There are the bollards along there. There's no chain to hold people in or out of that. I just think there's potential there—

**The PRESIDENT:** Potential liability issue.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, potential for something to go wrong. I'm just wondering, is the footpath our responsibility. Is it part of the parliamentary precinct?

**The PRESIDENT:** It's a very good question, which I'll immediately flick to Mr Webb.

**MARK WEBB:** No, the footpath is not part of the parliamentary precinct. The precinct ends at the fence line so, technically speaking, it's a City of Sydney and New South Wales police issue. Of course, the primary powers of the Special Constables are within the precinct but, like any police officer, if they see an imminent threat to safety or life, they can take action outside of the area. But it is, technically speaking, not a part of the parliamentary precinct. One of the reasons—there are many; the complexity of what's under Macquarie Street being one of them—it took quite a long time for us to get the bollards in place is that we had to negotiate with the City of Sydney because technically it's not our land.

We did consider the issue of chains between the bollards, but the safety concern there was with a group of people milling around is the fact that someone could trip over a chain and potentially fall out onto the road. That was considered to be a bigger safety issue than somebody stepping out. As you've seen with even a relatively modest protest, there are a lot of people milling around and the chances of that happening were deemed to be a bigger safety concern than having the gaps there at the moment.

All protests should be registered with New South Wales police. Even the relatively small ones should be registered with New South Wales police, who do make judgment about what presence is required to ensure public safety through the period. We do monitor any protests going on from a safety perspective. We are very committed to the democratic right to protest; we think it is a key part of our civil society. But, as you say, we do want to make

sure that people are safe in doing that. We are always looking at ways that we can try to improve that safety, as we did with the bollards as an attempt to protect people on the footpath. Whether they're lining up to get into the Parliament, whether they're protesting—just protecting those people from traffic incidents that could occur.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Blunt just has a short contribution to make on this issue as well.

**DAVID BLUNT:** I know there has been some commentary about the bollards project and the length of time it took to get them in place. I think probably Mr Webb was the most frustrated by that length of time that it took as a result of some of those negotiations with the City of Sydney and Sydney Water. However, I, for one, am very comforted by the fact that they are there. They are really there to protect the pedestrians, to protect protesters but also to protect people who are visiting the Parliament. On Sunday we had 3,000 members of the public visit. At various times of the day, the queues stretched certainly all the way along the front of Parliament House—at times all the way back to the Mint. It was very comforting to know that those people, some of whom stood in the sun for 40 minutes waiting to come into the Parliament, were protected from any vehicles mounting the pavement by those bollards.

**MARK WEBB:** I should also just mention briefly that, if the special constables do think that there is a safety issue, there have been occasions where they'll ask a protest to move closer to the fence to allow pedestrian traffic if the numbers are such that that's a possibility. We are always trying to monitor safety as best we can, but we are very conscious that it is stepping outside of our official jurisdiction, if you like.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What response has the Legislature made to the Minns Government directive to return to the office?

**The PRESIDENT:** Good question. Mr Webb?

**MARK WEBB:** Fortunately, the approach that we have taken fits within the guidelines issued. We're not bound to follow announcements by the Executive Government in terms of how the Parliament works. But we always look at it as a potential source of best practice and the like. We reviewed that circular when it came out. Fortunately, our current approach to flexibility fits within that, so we've not made any changes as a result of that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What is our current approach to flexibility? Now that COVID has long gone, how many staff of the 278 would be here working in the office on a normal day?

**MARK WEBB:** I will let David go first, and then I can go.

**DAVID BLUNT:** From the point of view of the Department of the Legislative Council, the memorandum that was circulated to the public service is pretty much doing what we've been doing for the last 18 months. When we moved back to the Parliament building in April-May 2023, the Deputy Clerk and I communicated to our staff that, yes, we're 100 per cent supportive of flexible work practices but the benchmark that we expected as a starting point for negotiations within teams was three days in the office as a minimum, and that is what has happened for the last 18 months. Our staff love being here. They love collaborating with one another and getting together. In a sense the public sector is catching up.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What was it pre-COVID?

**DAVID BLUNT:** Pre-COVID, although we had flexible work practices, there wasn't a sort of benchmark. I'd have to scratch my head and take that on notice. COVID seemed to last so long. It's a long time ago.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** On any given day, 40 per cent of staff are working from home?

**DAVID BLUNT:** It varies, but in any week we have—most of our staff are here at least three days a week.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** So 40 per cent working from home. That's within the directive of the Premier?

**DAVID BLUNT:** Yes.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That's consistent? He regards that as "return to the office"?

**MARK WEBB:** There is nothing in the directive that says that what they were pushing for is five days a week, no. The directive is fairly clear in saying that there needs to be reasonable flexibility, and we feel that we meet that. I should say for DPS it is slightly different. There are some teams, for instance, that can't work from home. It's very hard to cook a meal from home, so our catering team tends to be here five days a week. Cleaning—again, very hard to clean the Parliament from home. I should say, and this is true both of David's teams and mine, nobody is forced to work from home. If somebody wants to be here five days a week, they absolutely are here

five days a week. I myself do not work from home. I come into the office every day and I think that's necessary for my job and so that's what I do.

Generally speaking, we set a ceiling, if you like, for flexibility of 3:2 like David for the other teams, but we do vary it on a team-by-team basis. The Hansard team, just as an example, can't do 3:2 on a week-to-week basis because if it's a busy sitting week and then committees on the Monday and Friday afterwards, they have to be here for the whole time. We look at achieving that 3:2 split over the course of a quarter rather than each and every week. But some other teams do 4:1. No-one can go lower than three days in the office.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** At the last of these estimates, our colleague here the Hon. Cameron Murphy asked a very good question about the staffing of DPS and its increase by 50 per cent over the last five years going from 185 staff to 278 staff. Have we got them in the right parts of the building servicing the work of MPs? For instance, there was an 11-day delay in getting the Hansard transcript for the Rosehill committee inquiry on 9 August. I have to say, as someone heavily involved in that issue, an 11-day delay is just extraordinary. I couldn't contemplate such a thing ever happening in a parliament and it's certainly a blockage to me doing my work. If we've had a 50 per cent increase staff, should we reallocate into Hansard so we don't have any more 11-day delays?

**MARK WEBB:** Hansard—for instance, in that time period you talk about—has gone from 20 staff to the mid-thirties, 34, if I'm remembering correctly. I am aware of the particular instance. It was 11 elapsed days but that included four weekend days, so it's seven business days, three of which were sitting days. On sittings days, we prioritise the activity of the House. It took four business days for us to produce that transcript. Our target is between three and five days to do so. We average 1.8 days for the turnaround of the transcript of a committee. We have a process in place with the committee secretariat—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** You're got no problem with an 11-day delay from the actual committee hearing to when an MP receives the transcript?

**MARK WEBB:** With those factors that I put in place, sometimes that's necessary, but we do have a process with the committee secretariat to identify priority hearings for the turnaround of transcript. The team does work to set those as priority. For instance, I know the next Rosehill has been designated as a priority for turnaround.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Can I just say as a member of Parliament the staffing areas that have received this extraordinary increase in staffing relate to lockout rage, hurt feelings and so forth. MPs have two organisations that are fundamentally important to our work in this building: One is Hansard and the other is the library. Elsewhere, if the office is totally clean or you're fed or you've got hurt feelings and you can go and talk to someone to hold your hand, is pretty well irrelevant to the work that I and many other MPs do. Can't we prioritise the system whereby Hansard turns these things over in a couple of days?

**MARK WEBB:** I mentioned before the casual pool that we're putting together and that is to help in exactly that kind of situation. We have looked at other parliaments. The average turnaround time is between three and 10 days in other parliaments.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Which parliaments?

**MARK WEBB:** Other State and Territory based—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Other State and Territory parliaments?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, three to 10 days. We are one of the quickest parliaments going round. But I do take your point, generally. You are quite right: The Hansard function is a key function supporting members. This is one of the reasons why, as well as almost doubling the size of the Hansard team over the last five years, we're also creating this casual pool because, in those spike situations, especially now that the lower House is sitting on Fridays, we are conscious that that was having an impact on our ability to turn around committee hearings. We are looking to try to enhance that because you are quite right in saying that the ability to get access to transcripts is a key function for members. I agree with that entirely.

We're also exploring other options. It's more of a lower House thing at the moment as we trial it, but it is giving access to members earlier to the captions that we produce. If you wanted to get a quick early look at the transcript, you'll be able to look at the captions while you're waiting. We're trialling that with a couple of committees in the lower House, but that might be an option for the future. I would just remind everyone we have the video-on-demand system, which you can access instantaneously as well, so if you wanted to go back and watch a bit of footage that is available 24/7. We are looking to try and find as many ways as possible to give you as much information as quickly as we possibly can as we move forward.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** President, can I just raise an issue—

**The PRESIDENT:** Sorry, I think David wanted to say something quickly on the Hansard issue, and so would I. The first—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Just about on everything, we get three answers that are quite similar.

**The PRESIDENT:** I'm sorry. All I was going to say is I think you're right, that's all. I think that it is a critical and important part. But I do want to make it clear that I think Hansard does an extremely good job. It's not about the people who are there, it's about extra resources.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I'm not saying that; I'm just saying the 11-day delay.

**The PRESIDENT:** David, I'm not sure if you wanted to say something quickly or if we move on.

**DAVID BLUNT:** After the Rosehill hearing on 9 August, the secretariat did not communicate to Hansard that that was an urgent transcript because of the fact that the next hearing wasn't scheduled until 12 September. However, the secretariat has now indicated that for any further hearings of the Rosehill inquiry, they are urgent transcripts, so it won't happen again.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Thank you. Can I raise with you, President, in particular, something that came out of the Premier's estimates on Wednesday? At this gathering here, the members have asked questions and there's been the normal parliamentary practice that the people answering the questions work on the assumption that we're not giving you a pack of lies or we've fabricated material or we've invented material. There's an element of good faith in estimates where, asking the question, normally the person answering has some good faith that there's a degree of accuracy and credibility to what an elected member of Parliament would be putting to them.

On Wednesday the Premier—and it's said that you're in the role because you've been close to him in the past—adopted a tactic I've never seen before, and I think it completely destroyed the usefulness of the day. Every single thing that was put to him that might've been critical or required an answer that questioned public administration in New South Wales, he required validation of that, even to the point where, when The Greens quoted back to him some of his own words, he needed a transcript to say, "Can you validate that I actually said that?" This is a tactic that obviously wastes a lot of time, produces a lot of non-answers and pretty well destroys the usefulness of budget estimates, where you've got to validate every single thing. I had a document that required extra analysis and so forth rather than being read at face value. Can we consider that particular problem?

It was my third budget estimates with the Premier. While Berejiklian and Perrottet would obviously defend their political position, most of the time there was an element of good faith where, if the committee raised a problem with forestry or some public administration or whatever I was on about, they'd accept that perhaps there was a need to do something about it. But where you've got someone who requires validation of every single thing that's said—even their own words—you don't get anywhere and it's pretty well pointless turning up. Can we do something in talking to him or considering what happened?

**The PRESIDENT:** I'd make a couple of points on that. The first is, obviously it's entirely within the purview of any Minister or the Premier to answer in any way that they wish, so I'm obviously not going to comment on that specific inquiry hearing. The second is, though, that our Parliament, our Chamber, has within its remit the opportunity to determine how budget estimates hearings will be run—and we've changed a rule, in fact, quite recently on that matter. If this was something that wanted to be considered by the Parliament, and by our Chamber, then that would be something that you could put forward to them for that to happen.

The only other point that I would make is that when I'm in the chair for question time and so on, one of my jobs as chair is not to prosecute whether statements that are made—the veracity of them or otherwise, unless it's clearly outrageous, but to allow that interaction between the member and the Minister to happen as it should happen. It's up to the Minister to determine how they're going to answer the question. I understand your point and I understand the frustration, but it's not my intention to lecture the Premier on how he should answer questions.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I know, but it was a very unusual circumstance and a very unusual and frustrating tactic. It went for 3½ hours, and it frustrated me, The Greens and the Coalition—not normally bedfellows in a political sense. Is it available to us to recall the Premier on that basis? "You can go away and validate everything now." He can have a look at all his little quotes and facts and figures, and come back and give answers to these questions that he didn't answer?

**The PRESIDENT:** Obviously there are supplementary hearings. It's entirely up to the committee to determine how it wishes to proceed and who they wish to recall for supplementary hearings.

**MARK WEBB:** Mr Latham, you asked about the Parliament information system and the time frame that we're working on. At the moment, the intent is to run tenders and start the work in this financial year, and the work would go across the next financial year as well.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That's the installation of the new system.

**MARK WEBB:** Of the new system, so it should be—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What about the change management, teaching the staff?

**MARK WEBB:** That'll be as a part of that—the training, the change management et cetera.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Does that bring in extra consultants, as well?

**MARK WEBB:** No. We have people internally who will be focused on that. It's incredibly important to us that we get real practitioners to do that work. So we'll be doing that, moving forward. I have some other answers, Chair, but I might wait for when we get to the relevant member to give those.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Mr President, you and I are elected members of the upper House.

**The PRESIDENT:** We are proudly so.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Who elected us?

**The PRESIDENT:** The people of New South Wales.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Would you describe them as the electorate?

**The PRESIDENT:** I would describe the State of New South Wales as my electorate and yours and, in fact, every upper House member in the Parliament.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** As a member of the Legislative Council, it would be quite a normal thing for a member of the Council to, for example, meet with those constituents, take up their concerns, make representations to Ministers and so on?

**The PRESIDENT:** Of course. The fact that the Legislative Council or members of the Legislative Council are elected by the entirety of the voting population of New South Wales—absolutely. I myself have represented numerous constituents from across the State on different matters.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Given that, it would just be patently false to say that elected members of the LC don't represent an electorate, wouldn't it?

**The PRESIDENT:** If the definition of "an electorate" is the division of the State into 93 individual parts by which a member of the Legislative Assembly represents that particular geographical area, then it is not false; it's a true statement. If, on the other hand, you're saying there are a range of individual constituents who elect the members of the Legislative Council and that electorate, while it may not be referred to that way within legislation, is all of New South Wales, that is a perfectly reasonable intellectual supposition.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Yes. But it is an electorate. It's a multi-member electorate in the same way as the ACT and Tasmania.

**The PRESIDENT:** I'm not going into the definition the word "electorate", in that obviously people consider the word "electorate" to be representative of the 93 individual divisions in the lower House. But I would argue that there is a geographic body for which members of the Legislative Council are responsible—

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** An electorate.

**The PRESIDENT:** —who elect them and, in the way that they elect them, it is therefore their electorate. That is true to say.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Yes. Thank you for that, Mr President.

**The PRESIDENT:** I'm enjoying this.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** We're responsible to those electors.

**The PRESIDENT:** One hundred per cent.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** As I said, for somebody to then say there's no electorate that LC members are responsible for, that would just simply be wrong, wouldn't it?

**The PRESIDENT:** For somebody to say that there are no electors to whom the members of the Legislative Council are responsible, I think, yes, that is a statement that is not correct.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** There is an electorate, which is the whole State, and it's a multi-member electorate.

**The PRESIDENT:** In the way I defined it earlier, yes, with that appropriate caveat that I made.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Even with that caveat, if you look at the 2023 Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal determination, at paragraph 239, on page 65, the PRT—

**The PRESIDENT:** I love that you know that off the top of your head, by the way.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** The PRT says that LC members don't represent an electorate.

**The PRESIDENT:** Going back to the original caveat that I made, I suspect the point that is making is that they don't represent one of the 93 individually constituted geographical areas that are represented by members of the lower House.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** My question flowing from that is what has been done, from your perspective as a Presiding Officer, to disabuse them of this notion that we don't have electors that we represent?

**The PRESIDENT:** If there is a specific issue that you think has come up in the PRT that is causing a challenge because of this, I'm happy to talk about that. But if this is merely a definitional issue in saying that members of the Legislative Council don't have a specific local area for which they are responsible in the Legislative Assembly, then that's a different matter entirely. I do think, thinking about this issue for the first time in depth, that there is an expectation by the community that they will go to their lower House members for issues that are geographically relevant to them within that Legislative Assembly boundary, and I suspect that those are the sorts of issues that the PRT takes into consideration. But, as I say, if there is a specific—I mean, your fundamental premise is that members of the Legislative Council represent constituents within New South Wales.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Yes.

**The PRESIDENT:** I agree. If there is something that you think is problematic within the PRT—

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** My concern about it is that that thinking that there's no electorate seems to have infected the PRT's thinking when it considers issues. It runs through the determination, as members raise issues about such things as electorate offices or staff or travel requirements for other things, that same notion that there's nobody that you represent—there's no electorate. I understand the distinction between a physical place that might be a much smaller geographical location.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, and the fact that there's an electorate office implies that there is a greater responsibility to focus on the electors in that particular geographical location.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** My concern is that they're taking the view that you have nobody to represent when, quite clearly, members of the upper House do do constituent work. They do take up issues. They make representations on behalf of people in exactly the same way that members of the lower House do. They just do it for people across the whole State. Even if parties may work together to divide that work up, it still means that that occurs.

**The PRESIDENT:** I agree with the supposition.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Thank you. That's all I had.

**The PRESIDENT:** An excellent line of questioning.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I would like to ask a few questions—and it might be to Mr Webb on these ones to start with—about some of the answers you've given about particular contracts. I've got a few, so I might start with the one that I was most concerned about, because it goes to also staff and to a question that Ms Boyd asked. You mentioned that you get casual cleaning staff from an agency.

**MARK WEBB:** Correct.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** You may or may not be aware that cleaning is one of the most vulnerable sectors in terms of mistreatment of staff. I wondered what we have done as a parliament to make sure that those agency workers were actually receiving what they should, and whether you were aware that there is an organisation called the Cleaning Accountability Framework, which is a joint stakeholder group, which looks exactly at this to make sure that whoever is engaging cleaners engages cleaners that are employed in an appropriate way.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Webb?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, we are aware that cleaning is very vulnerable, and this is one of the reasons why we don't go around to just random cleaning agencies. We have a relationship with a particular cleaning agency where we bring people in so we can ask the exact questions that you're talking about. We regularly engage with that agency to ensure people are being paid appropriately. We also encourage any staff that are working with us through an agency, if they have any concerns along those lines, that they raise them with us so that we can make representations on their behalf if that was to come up. I wasn't aware of the body that you're talking about, but I'm happy to become aware of them and very happy to engage with anybody who can help us make sure that we are always fulfilling the obligations to people who work here in the precinct.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** That would be great because, as you would know, often particularly cleaning staff or other vulnerable workers wouldn't feel comfortable raising with us any concerns they have. So, yes, I would recommend that you speak with the Cleaning Accountability Framework, who has certified cleaning companies to make sure that they are paying the correct wages and are providing the correct conditions. **That leads me to other questions about contracts with external suppliers across the board. I wonder if you could provide—and it might be on notice—a complete list of contracts for services that we do source from elsewhere. I particularly also wanted to ask you about the IT contract you mentioned earlier. You said it was an external supplier. We noted that its role will be something that's quite complex and over years. The other question I wanted to ask is, in the case of a project that's going to last a while—and I know there is particular expertise in IT—is there not the capacity to bring some of that in house if it's a long-term project?**

**MARK WEBB:** Yes. For the support of those systems, that does happen in house—the long-term support of any of our systems. Probably the areas where we do have outsourced arrangements—if you want to call them that—the one I was referring to before was on the development of the system. This is an external vendor who provides parliamentary systems for multiple parliaments, not just us—South Australia, Victoria, federally et cetera. We do leverage off the fact that, in developing the system, we can all piggyback off each other's work in order to make that happen, but the support of the system does happen in-house.

The other area where we do do some outsourcing is with DXC, who do some of the things like supporting the servers that we run things on and some of that underlying infrastructure. But we are constantly monitoring that. Recently, for instance, we looked at where we could bring some of those functions back in house because we had time to develop more expertise with our in-house staff. That arrangement came in when we were subject to fairly extensive efficiency dividends over a long period of time, and it was the most cost-effective way of supporting some of the underlying infrastructure that we have.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Short-term cost-effective.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, but they have more redundancy than we do. Because they are managing multiple contracts, it means that if somebody is sick, they have other people who can fill in. A small operation like ours sometimes can't replicate that level of redundancy in staffing.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Can I ask a question about DXC, because I have dealt with them previously. Their staff—

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I just interrupt for a moment? Are you likely to continue on this line of questioning for a couple of minutes? If I ran out the door and came back, would that be okay?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Mr President, certainly. I will ask you some questions when you return. DXC have some staff locally, as I understand it, but quite a lot of staff offshore. You can probably understand where my questions are going. What do we do to ensure that the staff—I understand IT sourcing is very difficult and we can't necessarily get everything we need onshore, but that doesn't mean that there is not a responsibility to check what's happening. What have we done to check that those DXC people that we deal with offshore are indeed being treated in a way that's acceptable to us?

**MARK WEBB:** Very good question. You would be aware that over the last few years governments of both persuasions have introduced modern slavery provisions across the board.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I've written about it.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes. We follow all of those guidelines. We build into our contracts all the provisions that are necessary there. You are right that we do insist on a certain proportion of local representation. It is primarily areas where there is a skill shortage that they can't source locally where we do use offshore work—or what they might call "offshore resources"—for some of the more complex issues that we come up with. DXC is the only contract where there is that offshore component to what we do. We do monitor that very carefully.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I have a couple of follow-ups on that. The requirements for modern slavery are at the procurement end—so what we are doing when they don't go to compliance checking.



**MARK WEBB:** Yes, that's fair.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** What I would like to know is—maybe you could come back on this—fine, we get the tick-off to begin with, but what do we do throughout the course of the contract to monitor that that's actually the case? With regard to overseas et cetera—I'm going to segue into another question that I had, which is procurement of various items. I don't know how much revenue we get from our gift shop. I can't imagine it's a huge source of income for the Parliament.

**MARK WEBB:** It's not material, but yes.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** In sourcing those goods for the gift shop—I know that some of them are, indeed, very local, and I applaud that—what do we do? Do we, across the board, think about where things are manufactured? Without being clever about this, I raise this, one, because I have an interest in it but, two, because I recently had international guests here and their children had some of the parliamentary pencils with our logo and they turned it the other way around it says made in China. To take that back to where they come from, it's not necessarily an authentic kind of gift. So what is it that we do, and how do we ensure that—we don't need to have pencils.

**MARK WEBB:** No.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Why don't we get something that's actually locally made, given that it's not a revenue stream for us that matters.

**MARK WEBB:** I agree with that entirely. Recently our friends in the Federal Parliament did a complete review of their shop with that lens in mind. So we've been looking at what they have done. We do have some legacy stock of things that have been made and we'll need to look at ways of getting through although I would say that, due to the work that David and Mr President did with the open day on the weekend, we did move a significant amount of merchandise through that day, which is a wonderful thing. But what we are doing is looking at the sourcing of things for the gift shop at the moment. I agree with you: The things that we have in the gift shop should reflect not just the Australian character but the New South Wales character as well. So we are moving all of our items towards being sourced in New South Wales, and I agree with you: If it's something that we can't source in New South Wales we will probably look to not stock it into the future rather than have something made in China or the like in our gift shop. I recognise we do have some stock left that we are working our way through, but that is something that I agree with you on entirely: The New South Wales Parliament's gift shop should reflect New South Wales.

**The PRESIDENT:** We made that decision about wine that we were going to stock in the building some years ago.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I was going to ask about that one, yes.

**The PRESIDENT:** There's no reason why this principle shouldn't follow.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I just wanted to check—because I asked several questions in one—that you did take my question about a complete list of contracts to be provided on notice?

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, that's exactly right. Just so I'm clear and we get you the right things, because we have thousands of contracts, you are interested in the contracts for service that are provided here within the Parliament.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Yes.

**MARK WEBB:** Things like the cleaning contract, the work we do with the AVB team and the casuals there—the services that we provide from DPS.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Services, whether it's maintenance and all of those kind of things, yes.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, the electricians we bring in et cetera. That's taken on notice. The other question I think you've asked is around the monitoring. The work we do up-front on the modern slavery, that's great, but what do we do to monitor that, especially for some of those larger contracts that have an overseas component. I know we do that monitoring, but I will come back on notice with details about how we do it.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** That would make us ahead of most organisations, if we did something. I'd be pleased to hear about that, if we did. Mr President, welcome back.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Dr Kaine. Thank you for your generosity.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Can I ask you a question about Parliament and how we manage sustainability issues in Parliament?

**The PRESIDENT:** You can. Thank you for the question; it's an important one. As in the comment that I made to Ms Boyd previously about why we have a greater responsibility, for example, to be providing feminine hygiene products in bathrooms because we are an exemplar to the State, we also have a responsibility in terms of what we do in terms of sustainability, which is why we introduced a range of measures in 2019, and we work every day to ensure that we are a socially and environmentally responsible organisation. We've introduced BioPak crockery. That's obviously reducing single-use and disposable plastics. We've introduced that crockery, cutlery and containers, which is important because they're compostable or recyclable. We are strongly encouraging re-usable coffee cups. We, in fact, give a discount if people would like to come and do that. That was, I have to say, an initiative of the Speaker. It was an excellent initiative, and I'm delighted to say that catering really lean into this. They're so conscious of this, and they're buying sustainable produce wherever they possibly can. I am also delighted to say that something new has happened between the last estimates and now. From June, we've commenced the donations of leftover food from the Parliament to St Stephen's church across the road, which is really great. It is not only part of our war on waste to reduce the impact of our environmental footprint, but it also fulfils a really important and meaningful social responsibility as well.

**DAVID BLUNT:** If I can just add, by way of example, although we were so delighted to have 3,000 members of the public come through the Parliament on Sunday, they weren't very hungry. There was a substantial donation to St Stephen's and to OzHarvest on Monday.

**MARK WEBB:** And you got two-for-one sandwiches in the cafe on that day as well.

**The PRESIDENT:** It's really important. Other than the blip of the extraordinary amount that we're able to provide, generally we're providing about 60 meals per week through that, which is really great.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** They were so engaged, they weren't eating.

**The PRESIDENT:** Exactly. We've got a re-use philosophy where we possibly can. In meetings and events, we're trying to do washable glassware now, you would see, rather than either plastic bottles on tables or cups that can be thrown out. That's really important. We've got receptacles for waste. In Cafe Quorum, for example, you've got a food receptacle, a general waste receptacle, a paper receptacle and so forth. In the level 7 kitchen, for function waste, there are compost and recycling bins and so forth. We also had the members' buffet, and there are functions. We can't do it all the time, but where we can, they are then used as staff meals on certain days when food safety stamps and so forth are adhered to.

We also have an Indigenous garden on level 9, which is excellent in terms of reducing the carbon footprint on that transport. You would know, as a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I'm leaning hard into doing everything I can to send a message about the importance of acknowledging the Indigenous custodians of this land and ensuring that is reflected within the Parliament. We source locally when we possibly can, which goes to your point about the gift shop. We do that in catering. We're leaning into digital marketing so that we're not putting out as many paper advertisements and so forth. The point is that we're conscious of this being a broad and complex issue. Yes, sometimes our footprint isn't particularly large, but the message that we think it sends is that in order to perform these sorts of roles and to make it clear what we think is acceptable behaviour, it's incredibly important to send a message to the rest of the State.

**MARK WEBB:** Could I just mention briefly that every building-works piece that we do has a sustainability core to it as well. You might have noticed that in the car parks, for instance, we went from having bright lights on all the time to LED lighting that dims when there's nobody there and then comes back up again. We have six vehicle charging stations that we've installed. Basically, whenever we touch the physical environment, we try to do it with sustainability. Even at the front of the building, with the garden, we moved to a native garden with grass trees rather than a European-style hedge. It's all part of a broad range of sustainability things that we try to do to keep this as tight as possible.

**The PRESIDENT:** And whenever we replace any items in the building—televisions, fridges and things like that—it's always done with as high a tier as we can of the green ratings and so forth. All of that means that we will continue to improve year on year.

**The CHAIR:** On that question, has any consideration been given to some self-sufficiency when it comes to kitchen gardens and growing our own—

**The PRESIDENT:** Are you offering, Mr Chair?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** He wants access to the garden.

**The CHAIR:** We've got quite significant gardens and there's The Domain here. In terms of growing a vegetable garden and those types of things for use in catering and the like.

**The PRESIDENT:** As I say, there is already an Indigenous garden on level 9, which is providing some of those traditional and native foods, which is great. Looking to see if and how that can potentially be expanded is a good idea, with hydroponics and others.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I want to ask about the public cafe. I think the renovations have now been completed. What works have been done and why were they necessary?

**The PRESIDENT:** I might give a little bit of information to start and then throw to Mr Webb, if that's okay. Obviously, it's an important revenue source to the Parliament—a much more significant revenue source to the Parliament than the gift shop, for example. Clearly, we need to bring it in line with modern standards. We proceeded with the renovation for two reasons, noting that it's over 40 years old. Firstly, and most importantly, we actually had to upgrade the space in order to meet WHS standards. It was seriously in a bad way, and it was not in any way representative of a modern kitchen and workplace. That was the first point. The second point is there was the aesthetic appeal of being able to make it a more attractive place for people to come in. We've also had a look at, potentially, different food offerings that could be a part of that as well. So far, the patronage has been really encouraging and greater than what we had expected. The catering staff, more importantly, who do an extraordinary job, are thrilled to be able to work in a place now that's fit for purpose. For further detail, I'll ask Mr Webb to comment.

**MARK WEBB:** I would just say that was an excellent run-down. That space was originally designed as a staff bar in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

**The PRESIDENT:** Some of us remember that.

**MARK WEBB:** It did not meet not just safety but also Building Code requirements for that kind of space. It is wonderful that the staff are able to work in a safer but also more accessible space. You'll notice in the public cafe that now, if you're coming up to where you order and pay, it's a wheelchair-accessible height, for instance. All of those modern standards that are required in any built environment, we're now able to provide in the public cafe.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Is it still used as a bar? I haven't been in years.

**The PRESIDENT:** On Thursday nights.

**MARK WEBB:** On Thursday nights, yes.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Just on Thursday sitting nights.

**The PRESIDENT:** Any member of the public can buy alcohol from the public cafe if they would like a glass of wine with their meal or whatever.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I have to ask this question from a couple of my under-caffeinated members in the Coalition party room. On estimates days, has any consideration been given to potentially having Cafe Quorum open a little bit earlier and a little bit later, given that we're often here until about 5.30 p.m. on estimates days, and often members are in a little bit earlier as well, prepping for the day ahead?

**The PRESIDENT:** That is an excellent suggestion. The CEO has just advised me that we can do that. So let me tell you, Mr Rath, you've had a win today. We will do that.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Well done.

**The PRESIDENT:** You can advise the Coalition party room—in fact, all party rooms.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I hope those members who have raised it with me are listening and know that the Opposition Whip does a good job listening to their concerns and taking it up at Legislature estimates.

**The PRESIDENT:** He does an extremely good job. We'll obviously have to see what that means and looks like, but in terms of the premise you make, we will do what we can to extend hours on budget estimates days.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Excellent, thank you. In terms of the gym on level 2, I think we're in the middle of renovations there. Could I get an update on that and, as an occasional user of the squash court as well, has that been impacted?

**MARK WEBB:** You're quite right. We started the work in mid-August. It's due to finish by November. That's the time frame we're working in. I think we've mentioned before the accessibility and bathroom issues that we will be resolving. But we are also looking at the equipment in the gym and in the squash court as well. I am pleased to say you'll be able to continue to play squash in the squash court. But we are looking at installing other

things that will make it a multi-purpose space a little more—for instance, the ability to put up a netball hoop and be able to use it to practise. I believe there is a parliamentary netball team.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** There is. We're excellent.

**MARK WEBB:** Yes, so there is the ability for that team to practise here, and also the space is often used for things like yoga and the like as well. We want to try to make it very easy for people to adapt the spaces as much as possible. We're also reviewing all the equipment in the gym and some of that equipment with the pool in that same space. That space wasn't designed to be a gym; it was designed to be a pool. I believe if you look at old photos there were deckchairs where the gym currently is where you could sun yourself in the basement. I'm not entirely sure what they were deckchairing for, but it was there—interesting shots. But obviously it is a highly chlorinated pool environment and mechanical equipment like treadmills and the like don't mix well together. We know there are a few treadmills where the belts are starting to slip and the like, so we're looking at not replacing everything in the gym but getting the worst of that equipment and replacing it, and taking into account the environmental factors to try to make sure we select things that will last a little longer into the future.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** It's probably the most humid gym in all of Australia.

**MARK WEBB:** I should say part of what we're doing will boost the air conditioning and airflow management around some of the humidity. One of the reasons the bathrooms have got into such a bad state is because of the humidity and damp issues. It just wasn't good enough, basically. If you've ever walked into the bathrooms in the gym, they're quite dank. There is a persistent sort of mouldy smell around it no matter how much cleaning we do. We are doing some work on the air conditioning system as part of this work to try to make it a better ventilated space for the future as well.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I wanted to pick up on what we were talking about with sustainability. There is excellent work that has been done already. I guess I have a request, which is I know down in the office on level 6 there are some battery recycling bins and whatnot. They're not big ones you have outside, but if we could have textiles recycling. They're not very big; they would fit. I know that, for example, Vinnies at the moment has a shortage of quality—whatever organisation is appropriate, if we could consider doing that.

**The PRESIDENT:** I can give that guarantee that we will consider doing that and look to progressing it.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Thank you. I also wondered, Mr President, having been thinking about this for some time but also having just heard the excellent news that we are giving food where we can, if maybe under your auspices we might be able—I know we all have enough meetings and committees, but I wondered if there might be the opportunity to convene a meeting of any staff or members in the Parliament interested in, beyond our precinct but this area, the type of social issues that we do see. There are a lot of homeless people. There are a lot of other issues that perhaps we might as a Parliament with all of our collective brains come up with some other ideas about how we might assist, without wanting to sound paternalistic or patronising. There could be other things that we might be able to do.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that is a wonderful idea. I don't know what that looks like instinctively, so I would love perhaps to have further discussions with you, Dr Kaine, and in fact any other member either in the room or member of the parliamentary precinct or anyone who is listening to this online or reading this transcript about what that might look like. This goes to the thread that I've tried to weave through this whole estimates hearing, which is that I think the Parliament has a greater social responsibility than just being a building where people come and work, and, sure, where they pass laws. But what we look like and what we do is noticed, and it has a massive multiplier effect in terms of the impact it has on the broader New South Wales community.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I have one last question, and I'm not sure who to direct this to. Mr Rath asked earlier about the potential of a visit from the King. I wondered, would we be paying for a visit from the King if the King were to attend any of our celebrations?

**The PRESIDENT:** Excuse me for a moment.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, I was distracted. What is happening?

**The PRESIDENT:** We were conferring. The answer that the Clerk was half way through accorded exactly with what I had assumed anyway. Since he provided the information, I might get him to do so publicly, in the way that he just did for me.

**DAVID BLUNT:** As Mr President advised earlier, we're hopeful of a visit and still in negotiations, but nothing is settled at this stage. The general proposition, as I understand it, is that because the King's visit to Australia, which is a matter of public record, is happening at the invitation of the Australian Government, generally speaking, regardless of where the King is, whether it is Canberra or Sydney, the Federal Government

will pick up the cost for the visit. The nature of any specific visit to the Parliament though—depending on what that might be—there might be some costs that the Parliament would bear. But no, as a general proposition, my understanding is that the Australian Government is meeting the costs of the King's visit, including to Sydney.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I do have a follow-up question. If we didn't get the King, and some lesser royal who hasn't been ordained by God to rule over us was to visit us instead, would we be paying for them?

**The PRESIDENT:** Let's not deal with hypotheticals.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I don't think there is the divine right of kings anymore, by the way.

**The PRESIDENT:** Clearly there is a visit that has been well publicised by His Majesty to both Canberra and New South Wales. Let us look at that. Once we get through that, if there are other opportunities for members of the royal family to visit New South Wales, we can consider those on a case-by-case basis. All of those details will be dealt with.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** I have a follow-up question to those questions. I assume that if any head of state, let alone our own, were to visit the New South Wales Parliament or the Federal Parliament, there would be some costs involved in that regardless?

**The PRESIDENT:** Of course.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** Even when the Prime Minister of India was here about a year ago—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** But the Prime Minister of India is elected by his constituents.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** But there are many heads of state that aren't elected that would visit Australia from time to time and there would be official events organised around those visits.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** If he lived here, we wouldn't have to.

**The PRESIDENT:** Let's not get into this debate.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Let's take it offline.

**The Hon. CHRIS RATH:** You raised it, Dr Kaine, not me. I was just excited about the visit.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**MARK WEBB:** Chair, I have a couple of those answers that I alluded to earlier, and I recognise that Mr Latham isn't here anymore. My team, when I gave my follow-up answer to him, have rushed another note for me saying that that program of work, while there is a delivery in two years time, it will be ongoing, probably forever. So there is a lot of work in the parliamentary information management system space, the first delivery of which is in the time frame I outlined, but there will be further and ongoing work there. They felt I wasn't clear enough in saying that, so I do change that around. The second was, Dr Kaine, you asked about the phone system. My chief information officer informs me that what you've asked for is possible, so we will start working on putting that together.

The next one was for Dr Cohn. The team just wanted me to reiterate that both the SAP and the HROnboard systems with titles, as she was asking about, does require a manual intervention to have no title in it at all. It's very difficult for those systems to deal with nothing being in that space. So they just wanted me to emphasise that the requirement is that we do a lot more manual work in that kind of situation. It's not something that just happens automatically going through. The last payroll audit that we ran was in May 2023 and found no instances of underpayments, so we're very interested in hearing about the details around what you've found and we can look into that.

I said that we were the only Changing Places place in the Sydney CBD, which was true when we introduced Changing Places, but my team tells me that a few venues have followed suit. There are now a handful of them around the Sydney CBD. We are no longer the only Changing area in here. Finally, I am reminded that the DXC contract that we have is actually coming to an end relatively soon. We are in the process of looking at what the next replacement would be, which will take into account the—obviously in the procurement stage but the ongoing monitoring of that, as well. It might not be DXC for very much longer, depending on the outcomes of that work.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Blunt also has something to add to previous answers.

**DAVID BLUNT:** Mr Chair, if I could add something in relation to a series of questions that Mr Murphy was asking about committee workloads and staffing.

**The PRESIDENT:** And not the definition of electorates.

**DAVID BLUNT:** Even though I well understand where it was heading was really about the impact upon members and members' staff, I did indicate that the committee office had expanded over the last five years from approximately 19 staff to 37 staff. That was possible as a result of incremental budget bids being supported each year, and hence the staffing establishment increased over time. We did make a funding bid for the 2024-25 budget to try and consolidate those incremental gains into an ongoing source of funding to be able to make 14 positions permanent. Unfortunately, that funding bid was not successful. We will be prosecuting that funding bid again next year.

In the meantime, thanks to some very collaborative and collegiate negotiations with Mr Webb and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, we've been able to put temporary arrangements in place and so the committee office will remain the same size for the rest of this financial year. Particularly, if the model that's provided for in Minister Graham's bill that has now passed the Legislative Council and has gone to the Assembly, if that Federal Parliament model of an appropriations committee of each House et cetera is implemented, I'd be very much hoping that any such committee for the Legislative Council would support that funding bid that we make again next year and advocate on our behalf to try and get that funding made permanent, so that we can make those permanent appointments.

**MARK WEBB:** If we're making pitches for support, similarly there was a series of bids from DPS around converting some of our temporary staff into ongoing staff which weren't successful this time around. We would likewise love the support of all members. I mentioned before, for instance, that our Hansard team has a significant temporary component to it. It doesn't seem like the activity is dropping any time soon, so we would like to convert that to permanent funding as well, but not just in Hansard. The flow-on effect: HR, finance, IT—our IT costs have gone through the roof in the last few years. You're using more internet than ever before with more people in the Parliament. Any support for those bids in the future—I thought I'd better jump in and add my plea to that of the Clerk's.

**The PRESIDENT:** However, Mr Chairman, a number of the bids were successful, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government for those bids being successful, particularly and not least of which the Macquarie Street upgrade in terms of the gatehouses and so on.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I forgot to say this at the outset. We've been asking all these questions and there were some questions from Mr Latham about staff and staff working from home. If I could just say, on reflection from another member, that all of the secretariat staff no matter whether they're here—I don't know where they are. They just do their work. They're always super responsive and very helpful for all of the committee work that I've had to do and keep doing. If you could convey that, or if they're watching, thank you very much for the work that they do.

**The CHAIR:** With that warm and welcome comment from Dr Kaine, that concludes the questions for this hearing into The Legislature. The secretariat will be in contact with you, I suppose just by appearing over a cubicle or knocking on the door, in due course with all the questions taken on notice. Again, thank you very much for your attendance, Mr President, and all the other officials. Thank you to the secretariat and Hansard.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, everyone. This was a delightful experience.

**(The President withdrew.)**

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**