



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEES

## **BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024-2025**

### **Supplementary questions**

Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service

**Local Government (Hoenig)**

Hearing: Thursday 5 September 2024

**Answers due by: 5.00 pm Thursday 3 October 2024**

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**BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024-2025**  
**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

<b>Questions from Ms Sue Higginson MLC</b>
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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Stronger Communities Grants**

- (1) Will the Government be seeking the return of interest generated since 7 June by Hornsby Shire Council from the unspent Stronger Communities fund grants allocated to the Westleigh Park development?
  - (a) What is the funding that has been allocated to the recovery efforts by the Government from Hornsby Shire Council of the unspent \$36 million allocated to Westleigh Park?
  - (b) Will the Government be seeking the return of all unspent money and interest generated from Hornsby Shire Council if the matter proceeds to court?
- (2) Has the Stronger Communities fund grants allocated to the Hornsby Quarry been completely spent?
  - (a) If not, will the Government be requesting this money is also returned to the Government?
- (3) Did Hornsby Shire Council receive any additional funds from the NSW Government under any funding stream and allocated to the Westleigh Park development?
  - (a) Was there additional funding through grants made available to Hornsby Shire Council in June 2020?
    - i. What projects were these funds allocated to?
    - ii. How many of these projects have had the State funding committed to them?
    - iii. How many of these projects have commenced?
    - iv. How many of these projects have unspent funds?
    - v. What is the total value of the funds that were given to the Hornsby Shire Council in the form of grants between March 2019 and March 2023?
    - vi. What is the total remaining value of the funds that have not been spent?

- (b) Will the Government be seeking to recover uncommitted or unspent grant funds from Hornsby Shire Council that were allocated to the Council in 2020?
- i. Will the Government be seeking to recover interest generated by the Council on unspent grant funds?
- (c) What is the total amount of money provided to Hornsby Shire Council by the NSW Government, through grants or other exceptional funding opportunities, between March 2011 and March 2023?
- i. How many individual grants or other exceptional funding opportunities were made available to Hornsby Shire Council over this period?
  - ii. What is the process for establishing whether funds are completely spent on the correct project?
  - iii. How many of these grants or other exceptional funding opportunities resulted in an incomplete spending of the money?
  - iv. How instances of funding, from grants or other exceptional opportunities, cannot be verified if the amount of funding was completely disposed of on the intended project?
  - v. What is the total value of grants or other exceptional funds provided by the NSW Government to Hornsby Shire Council have been allowed to return to the Council's general expenditure account?
  - vi. How much interest has been generated by Hornsby Shire Council as a result of grants or other exceptional funds provided by the NSW Government to the Council?

<b>Questions from Hon Chris Rath MLC (on behalf of the Opposition)</b>
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### **Demerger**

- (4) Given the prolonged nature of the demerger process for Cootamundra-Gundagai and the additional recent updates, will you commit to a firm deadline for the final decision on the demerger?
- (a) What measures are being implemented to avoid further delays and additional costs?

- (b) With ongoing operational challenges due to the demerger, including staff resignations and financial pressures, what specific interim support is being offered to the council to stabilize its operations?
- (c) How are you ensuring that essential services continue uninterrupted during this period?

### **Code of Conduct**

- (5) The proposed reforms include financial penalties and enhanced powers for mayors. How will you ensure these measures are enforceable without creating new bureaucratic bottlenecks?
  - (a) What is the plan for training councils on these new responsibilities, and how will you measure their effectiveness?
- (6) The proposed reforms include making councillors personally liable for fines when they engage in serious misconduct. How will this approach ensure accountability without discouraging public service or being perceived as excessively punitive?
  - (a) What safeguards are in place to differentiate between genuine misconduct and errors made in good faith?
- (7) Balancing Act: While the aim is to deter misconduct, how do you plan to balance this with the need to attract and retain qualified individuals to serve as councillors?
  - (a) Are there concerns that the threat of personal financial penalties could deter capable individuals from standing for election?

### **Transparency and Public Trust:**

- (8) Given the proposed changes to improve transparency, such as banning closed briefing sessions and enhancing meeting practices, how will you ensure that these reforms effectively restore public trust in local government?
  - (a) What mechanisms will be put in place for ongoing public reporting on the progress and outcomes of these changes?

### **Financial Sustainability of Councils**

- (9) What specific outcomes do you expect from the Inquiry, and how will these findings translate into concrete actions?

- (a) Can you provide a timeline for when councils can expect to see changes implemented based on the Inquiry's recommendations?
- (10) Given many councils are already facing severe financial strain, what immediate measures are being taken to provide relief while the Inquiry is underway?
  - (a) How are you ensuring that councils can continue to provide essential services without compromising their financial stability?
- (11) How are you ensuring that the views and experiences of all councils, especially those in dire financial situations, are adequately represented in the Inquiry?
  - (a) What steps are being taken to actively involve councils in the process to ensure that the Inquiry addresses their specific needs and challenges?
- (12) Beyond the Inquiry, what mechanisms will be put in place to improve financial accountability and governance within councils?
  - (a) How will the government support councils in implementing best practices to enhance financial sustainability?

### **Financial Oversight and Governance at New England Weeds Authority**

- (13) Has the administrator had the term of this contract extended?
- (14) With NEWA's reliance on competitive WAP grants and the risk of future funding being jeopardized, how will the government support NEWA in diversifying its funding sources?
  - (a) What strategies are in place to reduce dependency on uncertain grants?
- (15) Given the serious governance issues highlighted, what specific reforms will be implemented to improve financial oversight and accountability within NEWA?
  - (a) How will the state government ensure that similar governance failures do not occur in other regional councils?

### **Strategic Policy Unit: Topic 5**

- (16) The Strategic Policy Unit was reportedly established with staff seconded from other departments, focusing on the councillor conduct framework, financial sustainability, and improving the management of complaints. What are the measurable outcomes or achievements of the Strategic Policy Unit since its establishment?

- (a) How are these outcomes being communicated to the broader local government sector?

### **Animal Welfare – rehoming, RSPCA – Topic 6**

- (17) The government committed to reviewing and developing a sustainable long-term funding model for animal welfare compliance and enforcement. What progress has been made on this commitment, and when can the RSPCA expect clarity on future funding to avoid operational disruptions?
- (18) With animal shelters at capacity and the RSPCA facing financial constraints, what specific steps is the government taking to support organisations involved in rehoming animals?
  - (a) Are there any plans to expand shelter capacities or provide additional resources to assist with the growing demand?
- (19) Can you provide an update on the government's initiatives around cat containment and welfare?
  - (a) How are these efforts being integrated into the broader animal welfare strategy in NSW?

### **Closure of Greyhound Rehoming Facility**

- (20) The recent closure of the Greyhound Rehoming facility at Wyee has left a gap in services. Has the government reached out to other greyhound rehoming organisations to understand the impact on their operations, and what support is being provided to ensure continuity in rehoming efforts?

### **Media releases and statements**

- (21) Are all the ministerial media releases and statements issued by you publicly available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases>?
  - (a) If no, why?

### **GIPA Applications – Department(s)/Agency(s)**

- (22) Since 28 March 2023, have you and/or your ministerial office given instructions to your portfolio department(s)/agency(s) in relation to Government Information (Public Access) Act application(s)?

### **Signal**

(23) Are you on Signal?

(a) If yes, do you access Signal from a NSW Government device?

### **CFMEU membership**

(24) Have you ever been a member of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU)?

(a) If yes, when?

### **Department(s)/Agency(s) Annual Reports**

(25) In what month will the 2023-24 annual reports for each department / agency in your portfolio be published?

(26) Will the 2023-24 annual reports for the department / agency in your portfolio include a printed copy?

(a) If yes, how much is budgeted for printing in 2024-25?

### **ETU membership**

(27) Have you ever been a member of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU)?

(a) If yes, when?

### **Paper shredder**

(28) Does your ministerial office have a paper shredder?

### **Department(s)/Agency(s) in Portfolio**

(29) What department(s)/agency(s) are included in your portfolio?

### **Former Ministerial Employees**

(30) Are there any former employee from your ministerial office now employed by any department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities?

(a) If yes, how many?

### **Qantas Chairman's Club**

(31) Are you a Member of the Qantas Chairman's Club?

(a) If no, have you ever previously been a member?

- (b) If yes, when did you cease to be a member?
- (c) If yes, when did you initially become a member?
- (d) If yes, when did you make a declaration to The Cabinet Office?
- (e) If yes, how many times since 28 March 2023 have you used the Qantas Chairman's Club?

### **Ministerial Staff – Local Government Councillors**

- (32) As at 30 June 2024, how many of your ministerial staff were local government councillors?
- (33) What local government(s) did they serve?

### **Union membership fees**

- (34) What was the expenditure for you to join a union in:
  - (a) 2022-23?
  - (b) 2023-24?
  - (c) 2024-25?

### **ETU meetings**

- (35) Given ministerial diary disclosures do not include all meetings and provide exceptions to disclosures, since 28 March 2023, have you met with the ETU?

### **State Records Act**

- (36) Have you and your ministerial office had training and/or a briefing about the State Records Act from State Records NSW and/or The Cabinet Office and/or Premier's Department?
  - (a) If yes, when?

### **Legal Costs**

- (37) How much did the Department/agencies within your portfolio responsibilities spend in legal costs since 28 March 2023?
  - (a) For what specific purposes or matters was legal advice sought?
- (38) Are you a member of a union?
  - (a) If yes, what union?



## **Advertising**

- (39) How much has each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities spent on advertising or sponsored posts since 28 March 2023 on the following social media platforms:
- (a) Facebook
  - (b) Instagram
  - (c) LinkedIn
  - (d) TikTok
  - (e) YouTube
  - (f) X (formerly known as Twitter)

## **Catering**

- (40) How much of your ministerial budget was spent on catering in 2023-24?
- (41) Was catering used for external stakeholders?
- (a) If yes, who were these external stakeholders?

## **Parliamentary Secretary**

- (42) Does your Parliamentary Secretary have pass access to your ministerial office?
- (43) Does your Parliamentary Secretary have a desk in your ministerial office?
- (44) Did any catering costs in 2023-24 include expenditure on alcohol?

## **Senior Executive Drivers**

- (45) How many senior executives in your portfolio department(s) / agency(s) have a driver?

## **Speeches**

- (46) Does your portfolio department(s) / agency(s) draft and write speeches for you?
- (47) How many public servants have undertaken writing speeches in your portfolio department(s) / agency(s)?

## **Hard hats and/or vests**

- (48) Do you have a hard hat and/or vest for visiting infrastructure sites?
- (a) If yes, was it paid from your ministerial budget?

## **Gin**

- (49) Since 28 March 2023, have you or your ministerial office purchased 'gin' using your ministerial budget?

## **Ministerial Advisers**

- (50) How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office in 2023-24 FY?  
(51) What is the average salary for staff members in your ministerial office in 2023-24 FY?

## **Ministerial disclosures to The Cabinet Office**

- (52) On what date did you last update/make a ministerial disclosure to The Cabinet Office?

## **Stationery**

- (53) How much of your ministerial budget was spent on stationery in 2023-24?  
(54) Did your stationery expenditure include gifts for external stakeholders?  
(a) If yes, what was the gift(s)?  
(b) If yes, who received the gift(s)?

## **GIPA Applications / Standing Order 52 – Ministerial Office**

- (55) Does your ministerial office have staff member(s) to undertake Government Information (Public Access) Act application(s) and/or Standing Order 52 requests?  
(a) If yes, has that ministerial staffer(s) received formal training about their legal obligations?  
(56) How many GIPA Applications have been received by your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?

## **Police Commissioner Gin**

- (57) Have you received gin from the Police Commissioner?

## **E-Toll**

- (58) Does your ministerial vehicle have an E-Toll?  
(a) If yes, is expenditure paid by your by your ministerial budget?

## **Department(s)/Agency(s) Gifts and Hospitality Register**

(59) Does your portfolio department(s)/agency(s) have a gifts and/or hospitality register?

(a) If yes, is it available online?

i. If yes, what is the URL?

### **Workplace complaints**

(60) Have you been the subject of any workplace complaints, including bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment since 28 March 2023?

(61) Has any member of your ministerial staff been the subject of any workplace complaints, including bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment since 28 March 2023?

### **Ministerial Code of Conduct**

(62) Since 28 March 2023, have you breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct?

(a) If yes, what was the breach?

### **TikTok**

(63) Are you on TikTok?

(a) If yes, do you access TikTok from a NSW Government device?

### **CFMEU meeting**

(64) Given ministerial diary disclosures do not include all meetings and provide exceptions to disclosures, since 28 March 2023, have you met with the CFMEU?

### **Credit Cards**

(65) Have you ever been issued with a credit card by a NSW Government department(s) and/or agency(s) since 28 March 2023?

(a) If yes, under what circumstance?

(b) If yes, what items and expenditure was undertaken?

(66) For each department, agency and/or other body in the Minister's portfolio please report:

(a) How many credit cards are currently on issue for staff? (Please provide a break-down of this information by grade)

(b) What was the value of the largest reported purchase on a credit card for the last year?

(c) What was each largest reported purchase for?

- (d) What was the largest amount outstanding on a single card at the end of a payment period?
- (e) And what was the card holder's employment grade?
- (f) How many credit cards have been reported lost or stolen?
- (g) What was the cost to replace them?
- (h) How many credit card purchases were deemed to be illegitimate or contrary to agency policy?
  - i. How many purchases were asked to be repaid on the basis that they were illegitimate or contrary to agency policy and what was the total value thereof?
  - ii. Were all those amounts repaid?
- (i) Are any credit cards currently on issue connected to rewards schemes?
  - i. Do staff receive any personal benefit as a result of those reward schemes?
  - ii. Can a copy of the staff credit card policy please be provided?

### **Ministerial Vehicles and Driving Offences**

- (67) Since 28 March 2023, have you personally driven your ministerial vehicle?
- (68) As a driver since 28 March 2023:
  - (a) Have you been pulled over by the NSW Police Force?
  - (b) Have you been fined for speeding?
  - (c) Have you been fined for school zone related offence?
  - (d) Have you been fined for red light related offence?
  - (e) Have you been involved in an accident that included the NSW Police attending the scene?
    - i. If yes to a) to e), did this include whilst driving your ministerial vehicle?

### **Department(s)/agency(s) desk or office**

- (69) Do you have a desk or office in your portfolio department(s)/agency(s) building(s)?

### **Land audit – Department(s)/Agency(s)**

(70) Has your portfolio department(s)/agency(s) undertaken a land audit of surplus government property in any of the following postcodes:

(a) 2077?

(b) 2079?

(c) 2080?

(d) 2081?

(e) 2082?

(f) 2083?

(g) 2117?

(h) 2118?

(i) 2119?

(j) 2120?

(k) 2121?

(l) 2125?

(m) 2126?

(n) 2151?

(o) 2154?

(p) 2156?

(q) 2157?

(r) 2158?

(s) 2159?

(t) 2756?

(u) 2775?

i. If yes to (a) to (u), how many properties have been identified

### **Mobile phones**

(71) How many mobile phones has your ministerial office been allocated as at 1 July 2024?

(72) How many mobile phones in your ministerial office have been lost or stolen since 28 March 2023?

### **Efficiency dividends**

(73) Was an efficiency dividend applied to your portfolio department(s) / agency(s) within your portfolio responsibilities in:

(a) 2023-24?

(b) 2024-25?

i. If so, what was the efficiency dividend applied to each department/agency?

ii. What measures are being considered to achieve this efficiency dividend?

### **Consultants**

(74) Since 28 March 2023, how many consultancy contracts have been signed in your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?

(a) What was the individual amount of each contract?

(b) What is the purpose of each contract?

(c) Who was the contract with?

(d) Did the contract go through a competitive tender?

### **Ministerial staff disclosure of gifts and/or hospitality**

(75) Does your ministerial office keep a register of gifts and/or hospitality for staff to make disclosures?

(76) Have any staff members in your office been the recipient of any free hospitality?

(a) What was the total value of the hospitality received?

(b) Are these gifts of hospitality declared?

### **Department(s)/Agency(s) Travel**

(77) As Minister, do you approve overseas travel for public servants in your portfolio department(s) / Agency(s)?

(a) If yes, how many overseas trips have you approved since 28 March 2023?

- (78) Since 28 March 2023, how much has been spent on charter air flights by your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
- (79) Since 28 March 2023, how much has been spent on domestic flights by your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
- (a) Of these, how many flights were taken in business class?
- (80) Since 28 March 2023, how much has been spent on international flights by your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
- (a) Of these, how many flights were taken in business class?
- (b) Of these, how many flights were taken in first class?
- (81) What was the total expenditure since 28 March 2023 by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities on:
- (a) Taxi hire?
- (b) Ridesharing services?
- (c) Limousine/private car hire?
- (d) Hire car rental?

### **Training**

- (82) Since 28 March 2023, have you had training from an external stakeholder that included an invoice and payment paid for using your ministerial budget?
- (a) If yes, what is the description of training?
- (b) If yes, how much?

### **Cabinet documents**

- (83) Since 28 March 2023, have you shared Cabinet documents with your Parliamentary Secretary?

### **Website usage**

- (84) What were the top 20 most utilised (by data sent and received) unique domain names accessed by your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?
- (85) What were the top 20 most accessed (by number of times accessed) unique domain names accessed by your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?

### **Department(s)/Agency(s) Employees**

- (86) How many senior executive service employees were employed by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities on:
- (a) 28 March 2023?
  - (b) 1 July 2023?
  - (c) 1 January 2024?
  - (d) 1 July 2024?
- (87) How many public servants within your portfolio department(s)/agency(s) were paid more than the Premier in 2023-24?
- (88) How many redundancies were processed by each Department(s)/agency(s) within your portfolio responsibilities since 28 March 2023?
- (a) Of these redundancies, how many were:
    - i. Voluntary?
    - ii. Forced?
  - (b) What was the total cost of all redundancies in each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities?

### **Ministerial visits**

- (89) Since 28 March 2023, have you visited any of these postcodes:
- (a) 2077?
  - (b) 2079?
  - (c) 2080?
  - (d) 2081?
  - (e) 2082?
  - (f) 2083?
  - (g) 2117?
  - (h) 2118?
  - (i) 2119?



- (j) 2120?
- (k) 2121?
- (l) 2125?
- (m) 2126?
- (n) 2151?
- (o) 2154?
- (p) 2156?
- (q) 2157?
- (r) 2158?
- (s) 2159?
- (t) 2756?
- (u) 2775?

i. If yes to (a) to (u):

1. What was the purpose of the visit(s)?
2. Did you make a funding announcement(s)?

### **Camera, video recorder and microphones**

(90) Does your ministerial office have the following paid by your ministerial budget:

- (a) Handheld camera?
- (b) Handheld video recorder?
- (c) Microphone?

i. If yes to (a) to (c), how much is each worth when purchased?

### **Cabinet Sub Committees**

(91) What cabinet sub committees are you a member of?

<b>Questions from Ms Abigail Boyd MLC</b>
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### **Animals and domestic and family violence (DFV)**

(92) How much funding is provided to local councils to provide crisis accommodation in council-run facilities for animals impacted by DFV?

(a) How many councils are provided with such funding by the NSW government?

### **Pet Registry and community education**

(93) In answers to supplementary questions from Budget Estimates in March 2024, you said that engagement and education programs were under development. Will this include community engagement and education as well as stakeholder engagement?

(a) Of the \$21.6 million allocated toward the Pet Registry rollout, how much is specifically for community education and engagement?

(b) Will this include any targeted community education specifically in relation to desexing and microchipping?

### **Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs)**

(94) Is DPI and or OLG aware of any councils in NSW that have successfully phased out or significantly reduced the use of SGARs in their management practices?

(95) If so, what specific support or resources is DPI and or OLG providing to facilitate the sharing of these best practices and alternative control strategies with other councils across NSW?

(96) Has the DPI and or OLG considered developing guidelines or a policy framework to assist councils in transitioning away from SGARs to more environmentally friendly rodent management methods?

(97) What funding or support mechanisms, if any, are available to councils looking to implement alternative rodent management measures?

### **Central Coast Council Administrator**

(98) Did the Central Coast Council Administrator Rik Hart consult with either the OLG or the Minister prior to reinstating the decision originally resolved at an Ordinary Council Meeting on 11 May 2021, to hold a referendum on 14 September 2024 with the question “do you favour a reduction in the number of Central Coast Councillors from fifteen to nine”?

(99) Did the former Central Coast Council Administrator Dick Persson consult with either the OLG or the Minister at any time in relation to a potential referendum with the question “do you favour a reduction in the number of Central Coast Councillors from fifteen to nine”?