

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 1

Friday 9 June 2000

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

THE LEGISLATURE

The Committee met at 4.30 p.m.

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. R. D. Dyer
The Hon. J. H. Jobling
The Hon. A. B. Kelly
The Hon. P. T. Primrose

Ms Lee Rhiannon
The Hon. J. F. Ryan
The Hon. Dr P. Wong

PRESENT

The Hon. Dr Meredith Burgmann, *President of the Legislative Council*

The Legislature

Mr J. Evans, *Clerk of the Parliaments*

Mr G. McGill, *Financial Controller*

Mr S. Bennett, *Manager, Parliamentary Building Services*

Mr R. Brian, *Parliamentary Librarian*

Mr D. Draper, *Manager, Food and Beverage Services*

Ms M. Ganesan, *Acting Manager, Parliamentary Information Technology Services*

Ms Y. Andrews, *Office of the President*

CHAIR: I welcome you to this public hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 1. First, I wish to thank the President of the Legislative Council, the Financial Controller and other departmental officers for attending this hearing. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for the portfolio area of The Legislature. Before questions commence, some procedural matters need to be dealt with. As members would be aware, part four of the resolution referring the budget estimates to the Committee requires the Committee to hear evidence on the budget estimates in public.

Under Standing Order 252 of the Legislative Council this Committee has resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings held today. The Committee's resolution conforms with the guidelines covering the broadcast of proceedings adopted by the Legislative Council on 11 October 1994. The attendant on duty has copies of these guidelines. I emphasise that only members of the Committee and the witnesses before them may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery are not considered to be part of the proceedings and, therefore, should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, as with reporting the proceedings of both Houses of Parliament, the media must take responsibility for what it publishes and what interpretation it places on anything that is said before this Committee.

While there has been provision in previous years' budget estimates resolutions for members of a Committee and substitute members to refer directly to their own staff at any time, there is no such provision in the current resolution. Members and their staff are therefore advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendant on duty or the Committee clerks.

For the benefit of members and Hansard and the effective operation of this Committee it is very important that departmental officials identify themselves by name, position and department or agency before answering each question. There is wide latitude allowed in asking questions on any of the budget estimates and related documents before the Committee. However, where a member is seeking information in relation to a particular aspect of a program or a subprogram, it will help the President and the Committee if the program or subprogram is identified.

The Committee has agreed not to allocate specific blocks of time to individual parties or members. Members will be provided with an opportunity to pursue specific lines of questioning until such time as they have exhausted questions relating to that issue. I will endeavour to ensure this process is as equitable as possible and that all members are given an opportunity to ask questions. As you are aware, a period of two hours has been set aside for today's public hearing. If at the conclusion of the hearing members have not exhausted questions to which they require answers, the Committee may decide to hold additional hearings before it is required to report on 23 June 2000.

Mr McGill, thank you for appearing. As you were summonsed to appear, I have been advised that it is a requirement of the Parliamentary Evidence Act that you be sworn before giving evidence.

GREGORY JOHN MCGILL, Financial Controller, 14 Glen Road, Ourimbah, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr MCGILL: I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr MCGILL: I am.

CHAIR: The Committee is now open for questions.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I refer to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1. Under subprogram 1.1.1, it is my understanding that members of the Legislative Assembly, especially non-metropolitan and country members, have integrated services digital network [ISDN] links from their electorate offices to Parliament House. Am I correct in this?

CHAIR: You should relate your question to the Legislative Council.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: My subsequent question will.

The PRESIDENT: I understand that is the case, yes.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It is my understanding also that this is a secure link to Parliament House as opposed to that used by Legislative Council members, who are required to use an ordinary phone link, is that right?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, what you say is correct.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Could the President or any officer indicate the individual costs of such a link, if it has any specific advantage and what investigations have been undertaken, with a view to providing the same service to Legislative Council members? I can find nothing set aside for this in the budget.

CHAIR: A flow-on question to that is: Has any member requested that and has it been either approved or rejected?

The PRESIDENT: It has been an issue. I do not know whether it has been a request in writing but I know it has been raised. If you would bear with us, the Clerk has a bit more detail on the issue. Perhaps we could take that question on notice and get you an answer. There is no provision in the budget for it is the simple answer; but we will certainly provide you with further details.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I am interested in whether it is a superior service and whether Legislative Council officers have undertaken an inquiry into providing such a service for our members, particularly those in non-immediate metropolitan and country areas. I am happy to take a reply on notice.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Could one of the IT staff explain what an ISDN line is?

Mr EVANS: The Acting Manager of Information Technology Services will explain what an ISDN link is and what investigations have taken place to provide a better form of communication between members' homes and Parliament House.

Ms GANESAN: Currently we have issued a tender document to provide a service to Legislative Council members, from their home offices to Parliament, which is similar in construction to the service to electorate offices. The connection will be secure. We are investigating also the option of an ISDN connection, which is a high-speed connection, from home offices to the nearest point of presence. Whether that can be an ISDN connection or it has to be through a modem is still to be established, and it depends on the location of a member's residence.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Is there any time schedule for the resolution of this matter?

Ms GANESAN: We are in the final stages of evaluation of the tender and we have commenced negotiations, following which we will have implementation. It depends on those two positions.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It is fairly vague at this stage?

Ms GANESAN: It is difficult to establish a time frame, but it is reasonably close.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Could you indicate the average cost of an individual connection?

Ms GANESAN: It is not possible because it depends on the difficulty of the location, and what Telstra facilities are available between that location and the nearest point of presence. I cannot give you exact figures.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: How can you let and evaluate a tender if you cannot put a time frame or monetary frame on it?

Ms GANESAN: The time frame for the actual implementation is very clear. But because we are in a negotiating position at the moment and correspondence takes a bit of time, it is difficult to establish the time frame before implementation will commence. Once we sign the contract we will know how much time we have.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: What time would that be?

Ms GANESAN: There is an eight- to 12-week period to establish the connection in Parliament House because we have to change the way we are connecting to the network, and then there is a three-month rollout from the different electorate offices and the members' home offices.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Would it be fair to assume that it should come to completion within this financial year and that we may see the money in next year's budget?

Ms GANESAN: By next financial year, yes, it is likely.

CHAIR: Madam President, does that mean it has been approved? I assume it has been approved otherwise tenders would not be going out, or will it be approved retrospectively?

Ms GANESAN: With the new arrangement there is a buy-back arrangement of Parliament's routers and electorate offices, and the actual arrangement is for future data communication costs. The changeover is not really expected to cost a lot of money.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is it less expensive to access the network by ISDN than by a telephone line, particularly if you live in an STD area?

Ms GANESAN: It depends on the quality of the line. If the line keeps dropping off frequently, you are reconnecting every time and so there are reconnection issues involved. If the quality of the line is poor, the data comes through much slower, so you are on line longer. In terms of cost, there is an increase because of the quality of the line. So, there are issues to take into account.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is it charged at the same rate as access to a telephone line?

Ms GANESAN: Yes, it is charged the same.

CHAIR: Can the line we have at the moment be adapted or is a completely separate connection installed? In other words, does it require a cable to be laid or can it be done via an existing line?

Ms GANESAN: That would be evaluated site by site. Where it is possible to connect to a local point of presence they will make a connection. But if it is too remote and they cannot set up a service like that, it depends on the physical location.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is it likely that if it is too expensive to connect an individual member it would not be possible to offer the service?

Ms GANESAN: A decision is made in terms of the overall costing to provide the level of service. So, in the total picture it may balance out.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I refer to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, page 1-6, line item "Operating Statement", "Expenses", "Overseas delegation". In the 1998-99 budget \$3,000 was estimated and there was no change in the revised figure. In 1999-00 the projected amount was \$3,000, yet it was revised to \$34,000. In this year's budget the estimate has gone back to \$3,000. I note also that in 1999-00 in the Legislative Assembly line item "Operating Statement" \$7,000 was estimated for this same expense, and the revised figure was \$70,000. Would the President or Mr McGill care to indicate the reason for the increase specifically in both the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council budget figures?

The PRESIDENT: I must not comment on Legislative Assembly expenditure, but I am very happy to explain what looks like a difference in the Legislative Council expenditure. My understanding is that the \$34,000 is erroneous in that when the papers were being put together some expenditures of the Legislative Assembly were actually coded through to the Legislative Council. So, they have appeared erroneously on our operating statement. The amount of money that was actually expended was \$11,922. So, that is in fact a good-news story: it is about a third of what appears in the operating statement. I can tell you that it referred to a sister city study tour made by a joint delegation of both Houses. The \$11,922 refers to the expenses of the Hon. J. P. Hannaford and the Hon. A. B. Kelly, who were part of that joint sister city delegation.

CHAIR: To what city?

The PRESIDENT: To Japan. I understand the reason that looks quite expensive is that Japan is quite an expensive place to visit.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Therefore, the \$34,000 figure should read \$11,900. If that is correct, as you have said, and the Legislative Assembly amount was wrongly charged to the Legislative Council, the amount attributed to the Legislative Assembly of \$70,000 should be increased to \$93,000?

The PRESIDENT: Essentially.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: My question is directed to the Financial Controller. I do not recall seeing a corrigendum explaining that there was an error in the budgetary documents. If you knew about it, why was there no corrigendum?

CHAIR: How did the mistake occur?

Mr McGill: I have been directed by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly not to answer any questions directly. However, I am more than happy to advise the President, who can answer on my behalf.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: The answer is essentially that, until I asked about it this morning the mistake had not been picked up. No erratum was published today because we were at the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal putting a certain case to the judge.

CHAIR: If you had not noticed the mistake, it would not have been picked up.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: President, are you saying that you identified the mistake?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: That does not speak well of the financial establishment. Mr McGill, do I understand that your title is "Financial Controller"? Are we going to continue the charade that you are unable to respond?

Mr McGill: I believe I can respond to that question. Yes, I am the Financial Controller.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: How long has that been your title?

Mr McGill: Approximately eight years.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: What would you say are the qualifications of a person holding that position that might be considered, first, essential; and, secondly, desirable?

Mr McGill: You would obviously need to have a handle on the finances of the Parliament and have accounting qualifications.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Is that all? What qualifications do you hold?

Mr McGill: I am a fellow of the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants and I am a chartered secretary.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: How many staff are under your direct management as Financial Controller?

Mr McGill: Mr Chairman, I object to the questioning as I am officer of the Legislative Assembly and it is my understanding that the Legislative Assembly is not subject to scrutiny by this estimates Committee.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Mr Chairman, to that end, I draw the Committee's attention to the fact that Mr McGill is appearing before us under subpoena. He has taken an oath and, under the requirements of a committee of the Parliament and as he appears under subpoena, I believe Mr McGill should be directed to answer the question.

CHAIR: Mr McGill told us that he can advise the President of the answer to the question. The same staff also administer the expenses of the Legislative Council.

The PRESIDENT: There are currently 11 staff, including Mr McGill.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Although this process—asking questions and placing the President in an invidious position—appears to be the height of absurdity, can the President tell us what advice, if any, she

receives on a regular basis from Mr McGill? How do we receive advice from an officer who appears both unwilling and unable to answer questions under oath?

The PRESIDENT: May I intervene at this point. The issue about Mr McGill giving evidence to this Committee has been going on for many years. It is not about trying to hide anything or about there being anything going on with the accounts that he does not want us to know about. It is to do with whether the accounts section is managed by the Legislative Assembly or whether it is a joint section. That is an ongoing battle between the two Houses of the Parliament that is as old as the Westminster system. I think it is unfair to cast aspersions on the present holder of the position when it is really a very old battle.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I thank the President for her answer. I accept that it is an old battle. However, with respect, it neither removes the absurdity or the need to find a solution. I accept that certain things relating specifically to the Legislative Assembly could be answered by the Speaker if he wished to appear before the Committee. I can understand Mr McGill's difficulty.

The Hon. P. T. PRIMROSE: The problem would be readily resolved if we abolished the upper House, but that is another matter.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It would be easier to abolish the lower House; we can do that! Madam President, can you advise the Committee of how many visiting delegations you received in your dining room in the past 12 months? I realise that that is quite an invidious task.

The PRESIDENT: There were 10 visits to the Legislative Council by delegations from overseas countries. Do you want me to list them?

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Only if you wish to do so.

The PRESIDENT: None of the delegations required any substantial expenditure. I have had 23 official visits—and I am happy to provide more information if you want it—by ambassadors, consuls-general and other foreign representatives, but none of these visits required any substantial expenditure.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I think it is important to know and clearly understand the role that the President undertakes and the tasks involved in the presidency in order to appreciate the workload.

The PRESIDENT: Certainly. In fact, before I became President I was not clear about this function, which is only one of the President's many roles. It is a semi-diplomatic, protocol role. One of my functions it is to receive—often accompanied by the Speaker—visiting overseas delegations. Consuls and Consuls-General who are resident in Sydney present their credentials to me when they arrive and again when they leave. On special national days and other important occasions they often come to the Parliament for a reception at which cups of tea are provided. It is a very busy role.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Would you be present on most of these occasions?

The PRESIDENT: I am present on all occasions unless I am not in the city. The Deputy-President is sometimes involved. Since I became President there have been nine official functions when meals were served: three were held jointly with the Speaker, three were paid for by the Premier's Department, and we paid for the other three. There have been only two such functions in the past financial year.

CHAIR: Are joint functions held in the President's room or in the Speaker's room?

The PRESIDENT: I am referring to functions that I held in the President's dining room. Joint functions would also be held in the Speaker's dining room, but they are not included in my breakdown.

CHAIR: The joint functions all took place in your presence?

The PRESIDENT: No, these were joint functions held with the Speaker in my dining room.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I refer you to Budget Paper No 3, Volume 1, 1.1.2 Parliamentary Government, Activities, "Procedural and administrative support".

The PRESIDENT: That relates to the Legislative Assembly. I cannot comment on that.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I was going to comment on cost savings. I refer to Budget Paper No 3, Volume 1, 1.1.1 Legislative Council, line item "Procedural and administrative support". I am giving some history. In 1998-99 the average staffing was 31, which reduced to 28 in the current budget. What cost savings have occurred in that reduction from 31 to 28? And which positions have been deleted or declared redundant over that period?

The PRESIDENT: At the moment a number of positions are not filled.

Mr EVANS: The budget papers show a reduction from 29 in 1999-00 to 28 this year, based on average staff numbers.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: And from 31 in the previous year, so that is a reduction from 31 to 28 over a three-year period.

Mr EVANS: I do not have the details in front of me. I would be more than happy to provide the Committee with the reason for the reduction from 31 to the current 28. It was probably driven by efficiency savings imposed upon us by the Government in salary and wage increases granted to public servants, forcing us to pick up those costs through efficiency savings in our budget.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: My intention was to try to show that efficiencies have been achieved, but in doing so I obviously have to ask what positions have been affected and what savings have been achieved. I would appreciate my question being taken on notice.

The PRESIDENT: We will take that on notice and provide the details.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The State budget for 2000-2001 has provided \$4.1 million for asset acquisition including upgrading of equipment, computers, and furniture in members' parliamentary and electorate offices. Can you indicate how the equipment and furniture which is to be replaced will be disposed of? Is there any possibility that this equipment and furniture will be offered to the State's non-profit community organisations as a donation?

CHAIR: Are you referring to electorate offices?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Both parliamentary and electorate offices.

CHAIR: The electorate office comes under our jurisdiction.

The PRESIDENT: The furniture upgrade is a matter for the Legislative Assembly, and I cannot comment on it. The computers that will be upgraded are normally sent to auction. We follow the Government guidelines for disposal of assets, but if you write to me about your proposition I will certainly see what can be done.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Parliamentary committees play a crucial role in the work of The Legislature. A large number of inquiries have been held by the majority of the parliamentary committees, particularly the general purpose standing committees. What is being done to strengthen and increase the resource capacity of the committees to enable them to deliver on their very important roles?

The PRESIDENT: At the moment the allocated budget for all parliamentary committees is split between the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly on a 40:60 basis. The Council gets 40 per cent of the overall committee budget. The allocated figure for Legislative Council committees is \$1.5 million and we think we will run close to the allocated figure. Although current figures indicate the total budget is \$113,000 in surplus, that surplus has not taken into account some significant expenditure that is yet to be posted. For example, no provision has yet been made for the payment of rent for the accommodation of the law and justice committee in FAI House.

We have been advised by the Office of the Financial Controller that that item is estimated at \$40,000, quite a significant amount. Other significant items still to be posted to the Committee's budget include the cost of these estimates hearings. However, I have tried to keep down the number of departmental managers who are present tonight to help. I hope the cost of these estimates hearings will not be too high. Costs associated with the transcription services for this Committee will be approximately \$12,000 to which the cost of printing reports,

Hansard, et cetera, must be added. Also, there is about \$6,000 to be posted to the budget in relation to furniture for the general purpose standing committee secretariat. At the moment, we are running close to budget for the committees.

CHAIR: The last item, "Secretariat", was for the standing committees. Did your answer include the general purpose standing committees, to which the question related?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

CHAIR: They are holding a number of inquiries. "Secretariat" refers to servicing both?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, the general purpose standing committee secretariat.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: How are the costings of joint committees dealt with? Are they apportioned between the two Houses, or do they come under the Legislative Assembly's budget?

The PRESIDENT: They come under the Legislative Assembly budget, therefore, I cannot discuss them. The committees include Staysafe, the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission, and the Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Even the ones chaired by members of the Legislative Council?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, joint committees come under the Legislative Assembly.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I understand there is some degree of subsidisation of food and drink sold in Parliament House. Could you explain how this subsidisation works for the members dining room, the staff dining room, the cafeteria and the bar?

The PRESIDENT: That is an extremely detailed question. I understand that there is no actual subsidisation. The food is cost neutral. I will ask the Food and Beverage Manager to answer the question in more detail. There is no subsidisation of food. Staff salaries and wages are part of The Legislature's budget.

CHAIR: The question may have to be taken on notice. It is a detailed question, unless the catering manager can add any comments.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I am happy to take it on notice. What I am seeking is: When prices are determined, are the cost of wages, a nominal rent for the storage of alcohol, and other matters taken into consideration? How are prices determined?

Mr DRAPER: Food and liquor are run separately, and prices rise according to the cost of the food we buy. As to subsidisation, wages, electricity, et cetera are subsidised when Parliament is sitting. For out-of-hours functions, the person who holds the function pays for everything: rent, tablecloths, et cetera. The only time that is subsidised is when Parliament is sitting.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I do not drink alcohol, but I am told that alcohol is sold cheaply here.

Mr DRAPER: No, it is not.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: It is cheaper to buy here than outside, is it not?

Mr DRAPER: Not at a function. When people go to a pub or another venue, the price includes rent, wages, et cetera. When a person holds a function here there are three bills: food, liquor, and overheads and wages. If you divide it all up, people holding a function here pay what they would at the Regent, the Ritz or a pub.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I understand that alcohol can be bought to take away.

Mr DRAPER: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I also understand that the price is a bit below prices outside Parliament House.

Mr DRAPER: It is a bit below.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: If someone buys a large amount of liquor, does anyone check how it will be used?

Mr DRAPER: Only parliamentarians and people who work in the building can buy liquor. No-one from outside can buy liquor.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can they buy liquor in any amount they like?

Mr DRAPER: There is a mark-up on the product. There is probably a 20 per cent mark-up on the product, as against a 10 to 30 per cent mark-up on the product outside the building. It may be cheaper. You would buy a case of beer outside for \$18, or whatever; here it is more expensive.

CHAIR: It is not subsidised by the Parliament?

Mr DRAPER: It is not subsidised by the Parliament.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: My experience is that the only product that is sometimes cheaper is the house wine, which the Parliament is able to discount because it buys it in bulk. I have found that most wine prices are comparable to those one would pay in a liquor shop.

Mr DRAPER: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You are saying that the liquor is about the same price, but food is much cheaper here?

Mr DRAPER: Only when Parliament is sitting.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: For parliamentarians?

Mr DRAPER: Yes.

CHAIR: They are paying for the cost of the food.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: They pay for the cost of the food but not the cost of the labour or the rent. Is that how you would summarise it?

Mr DRAPER: Yes, when Parliament is in session or in working hours.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: There is one other point Mr Draper might like to confirm. Without going into the sums, it is my understanding that the House Committee remits to Treasury a very large sum of money each year. If any profit is made, there is a remission to Treasury?

Mr DRAPER: That is right.

The PRESIDENT: That is true. Quite large amounts get remitted to Treasury each year from the House Committee.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: How much?

Mr DRAPER: Last year it was \$600,000, plus an amount for the functions. It came to about \$1.2 million.

CHAIR: The members are subsidising the State. Madam President, although you cannot answer questions about the Legislative Assembly, apparently a number of upgradings are occurring in the Legislative Assembly. Is there any plan to upgrade the furniture of Legislative Council members?

The PRESIDENT: In the offices of the Legislative Council?

CHAIR: I do not think the furniture has changed since I first became a member. Perhaps some new furniture snuck in and I did not see it.

The PRESIDENT: There is no provision in the budget for the next financial year.

CHAIR: If furniture is broken or worn, it is replaced. Is there a plan to upgrade the furniture in the Legislative Council?

The PRESIDENT: Normal wear and tear would be taken care of, but there is no provision in the next financial year for furniture.

CHAIR: Is there a replacement cycle of 30 years or five years? Is there any long-term plan?

The PRESIDENT: We replace furniture and equipment on an ongoing basis. As you say, there is a cycle. There was the famous case of the wallpaper last year, when we were criticised in the papers for changing the wallpaper every 20 years. The same process occurs with furniture. It might not be 20 years, it might be longer.

CHAIR: We might be getting near to the end of the 20 years?

The PRESIDENT: We might be getting near to the end of the 20 years, because some of the furniture is looking very worn.

CHAIR: The Council has kept members up-to-date with equipment, such as computers, and I note that electorate offices are being equipped with scanners. There have been inquiries by some members as to whether there is any provision in the future for scanners to be provided per member or per office or on the Legislative Council floor as part of the new technological devices that everyone is using.

The PRESIDENT: The Building Services Manager says that he has an answer about the furniture.

Mr BENNETT: We have a program to replace, repair or refurbish the Tasmanian oak matching furniture throughout the building. That is ongoing. People may note that new fabrics are used, particularly on staff furniture where the original Tasmanian oak tops are replaced with vinyl. This year we are changing our orders through the recurrent expenditure for public buildings, which is not part of the budget that we are looking at tonight. Orders are now in place for approximately \$60,000 worth of furniture, which is an upgraded, fully ergonomic type of furniture. That is coming online and it has been designed to match existing furniture, but with tops that can be raised and lowered to meet ergonomic requirements. They will go into the building on a rotating basis. We are starting with ministerial offices at the moment and we will work our way through the building as funds allow.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Why would you start with ministerial offices, given that they are not in them every day?

CHAIR: Their furniture would not be as worn as the members' furniture.

Mr BENNETT: Not really, but we consider the ministerial offices the VIP offices of the building. On that basis we will start there.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I do not mean to be disparaging to Ministers, but rarely do Ministers get the benefit of ergonomic furniture because they do not tend to work at a desk in the same way that members do. For example, I have not seen too many Ministers using a computer, which is often what ergonomic benefits are about. It seems to me that it would be more useful to give it to members who might actually get the benefit straightaway.

Mr BENNETT: Ministers are not getting ergonomic desks, but their staff will. It will be a start, and we will roll on from there.

CHAIR: I refer to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, page 1-10, Building Staff. I am not criticising the building staff because I know they work very hard, but I note there is an increase in staff from 54 to 61, whereas the maintenance budget was reduced from \$334,000 to \$298,000. What is the explanation for the increase in building staff?

Mr BENNETT: That came about because during the year we left many positions vacant, up to seven at a time. It got to a point where we had to reappoint people to those positions. You are looking at the

reappointment figures to bring the establishment back up. We did that because The Legislature is under fairly intense pressure so far as funding is concerned, and Building Services chose not to fill a number of vacant positions.

CHAIR: Is 61 the establishment? Are you now up to the establishment?

Mr BENNETT: It is 63. We are still maintaining two below establishment.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: That has taken care of one question I had, because it was 62 in the previous year and that was brought to our attention. I refer to the Operating Statement 1.1.1, Retained Revenue, page 1-7. You will notice under "Other revenue" the figure for 1999-2000 of \$378,000. The revised budget was \$537,000. This year it is \$373,000. Why was there such a large increase, and what is it made up of, bearing in mind that in 1998-99 the figure was \$378,000?

The PRESIDENT: The bulk of it is a refund of the legal fees in the *Egan v Willis* case, which was \$137,000.

CHAIR: A refund from where?

The PRESIDENT: We won the case.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: From Treasury, is it?

The PRESIDENT: It is court costs. I think it is about \$137,000.

CHAIR: It is really one hand to the other.

The PRESIDENT: It was a lot. Another important component is that we have now started indulging in user pays and we are now asking the Ministers who have offices in this building to pay rent.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Are they paying?

The PRESIDENT: Most of them are. Part of the amount is the Telstra rebate from the Public Works Department. What looks like a very disparate figure is really a one-off. Most of it is the court costs.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: You are saying that about \$160,000 or \$170,000 are legal costs and the \$373,000 this year—

The PRESIDENT: No, about \$107,000.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Okay, there are other bits. What about the \$373,000 that is set down for this year?

The PRESIDENT: It is very similar, as you can see, to the \$378,000 that was the budget.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: But what is that made up of?

The PRESIDENT: It will be ministerial rent. We are now charging them for their phones.

CHAIR: Car parking?

The PRESIDENT: The Telstra rebate and the sale at auction of some of the computer equipment.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It is pleasing to know that we are getting some back. Of the 21 Ministers that you say are paying rent, how many as this stage have either not paid or refused to pay?

The PRESIDENT: No-one has refused to pay. Some are in the process of getting supplementation to do so.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Without naming them, what are we talking about—three, four, five?

CHAIR: What is the simple explanation; does the Legislative Council get the rent?

The PRESIDENT: The Legislature gets the rent, and we get five twenty-firsts of it.

CHAIR: Not 60:40?

The PRESIDENT: No, because we have five Ministers.

CHAIR: It is based on the number of Ministers?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: On that basis, have our five Ministers contributed?

The PRESIDENT: They are all in the process of doing so. It is only in this financial year that we instituted the idea of charging Ministers rent for their accommodation and their telephones.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: When will you report it to the Parliament if some of them still have not paid? Will you report to the Parliament by Christmas if they have not paid?

The PRESIDENT: It will be part of the debtors' figures at 30 June.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I am pleased to hear that. I appreciate the black humour. I note an article in the media reported that the Parliament's costs jumped by 12 per cent and that the upper House was to blame for that increase. The article alleges that with fewer members we had increased the costs. Would you confirm that there has been such an increase? Can you advise the Committee of what steps you have taken to contain it? Do you believe the article blaming the Legislative Council, as opposed to the Legislative Assembly members, who now have a lot less, is fair?

The PRESIDENT: I am not quite sure of which article you refer to.

CHAIR: Could you identify the article?

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I refer to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* of 12 May written by Kathy Lipari, a copy of which I will pass up to the Chairman.

The PRESIDENT: I am not certain what period of time the article is referring to.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It is referring to the past three years and suggesting that the upper House is to blame. I am suggesting that in actual fact that may not be the truth. I am asking you whether you can confirm that.

The PRESIDENT: We have a graph, which is bit hard reproduce in *Hansard*.

CHAIR: It does raise a secondary question. I note that the Clerk of the Parliaments has written letters more than once to newspapers explaining or correcting misinformation. Have you set up any system determining who should ensure there is accuracy when reports are incorrect?

The PRESIDENT: I will take advice on how we can make sure that only correct information is printed in newspapers.

CHAIR: Who writes the correcting statement? Do you, as President, write a factual correcting statement, or does the Clerk of the Parliaments?

The PRESIDENT: I have, from time to time, attempted to correct very, very misleading articles. A recent example was a reference to the rostering system. I have attempted to correct them. Sometimes it is a success, sometimes it is not. But, quite seriously, if members want to have a think about how to make certain that accurate information goes into the press and if they can give me their thoughts it would be excellent. I have a graph that shows costs.

Mr EVANS: I have two graphs. One is headed "L.C. Parliamentary Representation". That refers to the members' budget area. It shows that there has been a gradual increase in expenditure over the last four years. It

has gone from \$8.5 million at 30 June 1996 to \$9.8 million at 30 June 1999. The other is headed "Operation of the Legislative Council". It covers staffing and other resources. At 30 June 1996 the budget was \$2.19 million and at 30 June 1999 it was \$2.16 million. So there has been virtually no movement in that regard. So the statement in the media about the increase for the operations of the Legislative Council is not quite correct.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I seek leave to have the documents tabled for incorporation in the record.

Leave granted. [*See Annexure A (page) and Annexure B (page).*]

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: In the article you are quoted, I hope correctly, as saying that the problem of the Legislative Council budget is that "there is no guiding force". Can you tell me what you meant by the statement and what you are proposing to overcome the problem as the Presiding Officer of the Legislative Council?

The PRESIDENT: I think you might have misunderstood what I was saying in that statement. I was stating the correct position in a Westminster system, which is that the Parliament—in this case the Legislative Council—has control over its own functions. If the Chamber votes to set up a new committee, then the Clerk of the Parliaments has no control over whether that committee is to exist. So the Financial Controller and the Clerk are sitting there worrying about the money and the Chamber is voting committees into existence and referring issues to committees, all of which have cost implications. I am not reflecting on the decisions of the Chamber at all; I am simply saying that there is no guiding force in terms of controlling a budget when the Chamber is making decisions that then have to be funded.

CHAIR: Could it be argued that at the point when a new committee is being debated there should be some provision for the Clerk to indicate, for the benefit of members who may not be aware, what that may cost as a factor for their consideration?

The PRESIDENT: I think that might be good idea but it would need to be done at an informal level. I cannot see how it could be done in any formal way.

CHAIR: Perhaps the Minister could put it on the record.

The PRESIDENT: Yes. I am sure that it should be part of the debate. The problem is that one body is making decisions about how the place is to operate and another body is making decisions about how the money that we have can be used. It is very difficult.

CHAIR: I am not suggesting that the House would not go ahead with what it wants to do, but that information should be available.

The PRESIDENT: It is obviously very relevant when decisions are made about committees, yes.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Mr Chairman, I cannot let that go without a comment. I need to put it on the record. I simply say that there must be extraordinary care taken before such a proposal is even contemplated because it could well be perceived by any government of the day, by a Minister or whoever is in a position of attempting to enforce a will over the elected Chamber, as a method of directing members not to establish a committee.

CHAIR: I was not suggesting that. I just think that—

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: No, but that could be believed. I understand that it was an informal comment. On those grounds I would not argue on it further. I understand what has been said but I just—

The PRESIDENT: What I was saying was that it could not be done in a formal way. There should be no constraints upon members when they are debating in the Chamber whether to set up a committee.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: That is precisely the point I want to make, thank you. I refer to page 1-6 of Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, Operating expenses, Other expenses, Salaries and allowances of the President of the Legislative Council and others, \$2,236,000. What does this mean and who are the "others"?

The PRESIDENT: You are one of them. That amount refers to the Whips, the office holders such as the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party, the Parliamentary Secretaries, the chairs of committees—

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I come for free.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: No, you are on the line above.

The PRESIDENT: It is not just the allowances; it includes their base salaries. So it refers to everyone in the Chamber who has an office paid for by the Parliament but who are not Ministers. The Hon. A. B. Kelly, the Hon. P. T. Primrose, and the Hon. R. D. Dyer are included. I think that the Hon. J. F. Ryan and the Hon. Dr P. Wong are the only members here not included.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Surely somebody reading the operating statement with the line above, Salary and allowances of members of the Legislative Council, would reasonably assume that is where the members' salaries were and not in "and others".

The PRESIDENT: I also have a problem with the wording there. I have made the point that it looks like I receive a very large amount of money.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: And you want to know where it is.

The PRESIDENT: Yes. I think that the wording could be better and I have asked that it be better next year.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I request that we ask that an explanation of "and others" be made.

The PRESIDENT: I think it should refer to "parliamentary office holders" or something like that.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I accept that, as long as it is eminently clear that it also includes base salary and is not the base salary that appears in the line above.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, there needs to be something such as "salaries and allowances of members who are not office holders" or something like that.

CHAIR: "Excluding office holders". You need to explain in a little postscript what office holders are.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I had already made this point. We have to convince Treasury to use a different form of words because it is Treasury's budget.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Other people reading may well have that problem. I have been led to believe that you were reported in the *Daily Telegraph* last week as saying that there was no provision of funding to allow disabled access to the Legislative Council. Am I correct?

The PRESIDENT: There were inaccuracies in the article but I certainly made that statement. At the moment there is only a temporary ramp, which does not look very good. I think it is demeaning to people with a disability who wish to get into our Chamber. Our Chamber is the only part of the building that is affected. All the other areas of the building are wheelchair accessible.

I have had long discussions about it with the Principal Attendant, Ian Pringle, who worries about it a lot. We have had it costed. Unfortunately, because it is a heritage building and the ramp would need to be suitably elegant, it will cost \$30,000. It needs to be marble with a brass rail in order to fit in with the rest of the building. We asked for supplementary funding for that and were not successful this year. However, because of the Paralympics we are hoping that this building will be open to the public and used a lot by the public at that time. I am hopeful of getting the ramp built before the Olympics and Paralympics. It is certainly on the top of my priority list.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It is my understanding that the Treasurer has approved funding for that specific purpose.

The PRESIDENT: No, the letter asking for supplementation was not successful. However, I am having discussions with the Speaker about moving money around so that this can happen.

CHAIR: Would it not be more economical to have the access from the other side, at the other steps?

The PRESIDENT: At the Legislative Assembly side?

CHAIR: No, on the Legislative Council side, coming from the corridor.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: From the carpet side, the Macquarie Street side, rather than the marble side; where you walk up the stairs rather than where the ramp is at the moment.

The PRESIDENT: I think the decision was that the obvious place is where the temporary ramp is now.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It is probably wide enough.

CHAIR: Is there any reason why it is not from the Macquarie Street side, which may be easier, because the other side has marble.

Mr BENNETT: It would not fit in there. The gradient would have to be one in 20. You need to go into the Fountain Court area. We recasted it today at the request of the Clerk of the Parliaments and confirmed that it will cost about \$31,000, and we would have to wait for funding to do that job. It is a big job. It would have to be done correctly and matched with the materials of the surrounding area. It is quite a big job.

CHAIR: It is proposed mainly for visitors, but at some point we could have a member who is in a wheelchair.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Hopefully we will.

The PRESIDENT: I have noticed that some of our members have trouble getting up the steps. We should have proper access to the Chamber for the disabled.

CHAIR: There could be access through the members' room.

The PRESIDENT: You still have to get into the members' room.

CHAIR: That is right, there are steps at the other end.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, and of course public access to the Chamber is impossible; it is up a great flights of steps, and you have to go outside.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I note from discussions today in another place, before another body, that two staff members are supplied for the crossbench and Independent members of the Legislative Council. Can you tell me how many staff members are provided for the Deputy-President?

The PRESIDENT: The Deputy-President has two staff members.

CHAIR: The Chairman of Committees is the official title.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I would like to double-check because I was led to believe that the figure maybe three.

The Hon. A. B. KELLY: Full-time staff.

The PRESIDENT: There are two equivalent full-time staff.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: As I understood it, the former Deputy-President had a staff of one. Where did the authorisation for the employment of the extra staff member come from? Can you identify that funding in the budget, and can you advise us of the grounds for the authorisation?

The PRESIDENT: The authorisation came from the Treasurer. The grounds for it were several, but I think the main one was to do with a number of changes that have occurred in the staffing in the House since the last election. For the first time crossbench members make up one-third of the membership of the Chamber, and that has changed the workload and the dynamics of various people within the Chamber enormously. One of those was the Deputy-President.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Who sought the extra staff member? Did you seek it yourself?

The PRESIDENT: No.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Do you know who sought the extra staff member? I presume you approved it?

The PRESIDENT: I understand the member made a submission and it was agreed to. I cannot recall approving it. No, I did not. It was not something that came to me for approval.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I have to ask a question to clarify the situation in relation to a vehicle that is presently in the possession of and used by the Deputy-President. Is this vehicle provided by the Legislature or is it provided by the Premier's Department?

The PRESIDENT: It is not provided by The Legislature so it is not something that I can comment on at this estimates hearing.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: So The Legislature is in no way paying the cost of administering, running or fuelling the vehicle?

The PRESIDENT: Not at all. In fact, I can tell you what vehicles The Legislature or the Legislative Council is responsible for. There are two cars used by the Clerk and the Deputy-Clerk and two vans used for the general carrying of items.

CHAIR: And the President's car?

The PRESIDENT: No, the President's car is provided by the Premier's Department.

CHAIR: It is the same for both?

The Hon. A. B. KELLY: Yes, seven vehicles are provided that way; four to Coalition members and three to Government members.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: I am aware of the basis, but I needed to clarify it for the record.

The PRESIDENT: It is certainly not provided by The Legislature.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: It has been put to me that on radio 2BL last week in an interview with breakfast announcer Philip Clark you alleged that the purchase of expensive silverware and crockery for the President's Dining Room was authorised by the Hon. Duncan Gay when he was Deputy-President. Can you provide documentation in the form of a memo, receipt, et cetera that supports the claim?

The PRESIDENT: I have not got the exact wording of that interview in front of me, but I certainly remember saying that these were decisions made over many years by the President and that the Liberal Party and the Deputy-President would have been aware of them. These decisions were made for seven years and my understanding is that the Coalition was very aware of what was going on, and I made that statement.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I can promise you that they never were. Max was never one to reveal anything.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: In view of the fact that the President does not have any documentation, she may wish to listen to the radio tape again. President, can I ask you to give the Committee an undertaking that you will listen to the tape again and if the words as suggested to me are correct, you can and would obviously provide the documentation to support the claim?

The PRESIDENT: I certainly never claimed that he had signed the expenditure for any of the specific items that I was talking about.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: If that is the case, that is the end of it.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The key word is "authorise". You would agree that he would not have authorised it?

The PRESIDENT: Those items I was talking about, no. I never made that claim.

CHAIR: You meant that in your opinion he would have been aware of it?

The PRESIDENT: He was certainly aware of it.

CHAIR: Leaving aside the fact that it has been done and who did it, you now have this silverware. As you receive many important delegations, as you said earlier, it would seem to be correct for you to use that silverware rather than store it in boxes. Is it possible to use it for, I suppose, prestige entertainment?

The PRESIDENT: I certainly understand that point of view. That has been put to me as I do a lot of diplomatic entertaining. I am having valued the silverware that we can find. It just seems to me that much of it was overly expensive for what was needed. You could have an elegant tea service which does not cost the very large amounts of money that were expended. If we could raise enough from the sale of parts of the various tea services, I would sell it. But I certainly am not going to go into a fire sale.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It would be necessary to replace some of it though if you had to sell it, would it not?

The PRESIDENT: Some of it is quite unnecessary. Certainly you need the glasses and china when you are having a dinner, such as the luncheon we had today for the Mayor of Athens, who was here for the Uluru ceremony. Some of it is still necessary. But I have never seen the four decanters used. Some of the teapots and coffee pots I have not seen used. The sugar bowls and candy bowls and the \$100 teaspoons I really have not seen used either. The basic glass and chinaware is obviously needed.

CHAIR: As the Legislative Council has been operating since 1827 there would need to be a careful check to make sure some of the items you believe may be new are not part of the history of the Legislative Council. Some of the silverware could be from the colonial period. It would be a pity if you sold items that had some historic value.

The PRESIDENT: I am a silverware buff. I would not do that!

CHAIR: You will check the invoices and receipts to make sure of the items?

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely. We have a file of the invoices. As I say, we are still trying to track down some of it.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: What do you mean when you say you are still trying to track down some of it?

The PRESIDENT: It seems that some of it might not be in the President's dining room. It does not mean it is not in the Parliament somewhere.

The Hon. A. B. KELLY: Do you mean the Speaker might have knocked off some of it?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, the Speaker might have knocked off some of it! For instance, the silverware centrepieces on my table are sometimes used in the Strangers Dining Room. They are beautiful historic pieces.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: As I understand, some of the silverware and dining services in the Speaker's office are important heritage items.

The PRESIDENT: Probably nicked from us!

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I do not object to him using either. I believe that the chinaware is actually priceless because it was made for a royal visit that did not occur.

The PRESIDENT: That is right. And most of that is in a glass case. I see many people stopping and looking at it.

CHAIR: Earlier you mentioned the Paralympics and other matters, which reminds us of the Olympic Games to be held in Sydney. Are any special receptions being held or are there plans to entertain overseas visitors during the Olympics? I am not speaking of exorbitant functions, but are VIPs being invited by you to Parliament to attend functions?

The PRESIDENT: The Speaker and I put a stop on bookings in Parliament for the Olympic and Paralympic period some time last year, as soon as we realised this would be an issue in order for us to be able to deal with bookings during the Olympic period on a rational basis. We then had a meeting with someone from the International Olympic Committee and we decided to write to the national Olympic committees of all the countries participating to tell them of the function rooms available and that they would be available during the Olympics period.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: For a price.

The PRESIDENT: For a price. We pointed out that it is not a very expensive place to hold a function. It was a very welcoming letter saying that Parliament was here for the various Olympic officials of different countries. We were thinking of receptions for teams of athletes. We knew it would be the smaller countries that would be most likely to take advantage of it because all the large delegations already have set up hospitality centres close to Homebush. We did not get as many replies as we thought we would. Perhaps we should have sent it to the parliaments of the countries because Olympic committees might not be good at thinking about all the sorts of official receptions they would like to hold. For instance, when I mentioned it to the people from Oceania, because I felt we should have a particular responsibility to them—I believe they expect only to have a total 14 athletes from the whole Oceania area—they were totally unaware that those letters had gone out.

We have not had as many functions booked as we expected. However, I expect there will be a large number of parliamentarians in Sydney for the Games and that they will all come and see us. I am not certain that they will not all expect a bit of hospitality! However, it is the nature of politics that none of them will know whether they are coming until about three weeks before the Games. I have this vision that three or four weeks before the Games every politician in the world will expect to descend on Sydney. We are checking out what happened in Atlanta because we thought that might be a bit of a guide.

The Hon. J. H. JOBLING: Mr Chairman, would it be too late for the President to approach the parliaments of the various countries that might be interested to see if we can encourage them to use the premises?

CHAIR: At least parliaments affiliated with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA].

The PRESIDENT: That might be something that could be done through the CPA. We are still holding the bookings. They have to be Olympic related in some way. I believe there will be a large number of bookings made in the last few weeks, which makes it very difficult for our long-suffering catering manager. The catering manager informs me that what I expected to happen in the last few weeks is beginning to happen: small delegations have already arrived.

Mr DRAPER: We have delegations from Pakistan, India, Britain, New Zealand, and Switzerland, and a delegation from Macedonia is soon to arrive.

CHAIR: Do you host those delegations?

The PRESIDENT: No, not necessarily. Most of them are being arranged by the Consuls.

CHAIR: Although you and Mr Speaker are the official hosts, you may not be able to host all of the delegations; you will have to get other people to assist.

The PRESIDENT: I applied for tickets to the Games and was successful in receiving about half the tickets I ordered, so I will be at the Games for part of the period.

CHAIR: We will obviously have a lot more visitors to the Parliament itself. What provision is being made for that? For example, have additional attendants been organised, even though the Parliament may not be sitting that that time? At many parliaments there are signs on the front doors indicating that guided tours are conducted every half hour and that people should wait at a particular counter for one of the attendants to collect them and take them on the tours. Often visitors, particularly Japanese visitors, wander around this building looking completely lost. I feel as though I should stop and give them a guided tour. Someone should do that, to make sure they receive a proper introduction to our Parliament.

The PRESIDENT: During the Olympics and Paralympics periods the Parliament will be open from 9 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night. Managers will be encouraged to be flexible and to allow staff to

take leave, for child-care responsibilities and to attend Olympic events. It is still unclear whether there will be a large number of visitors, but we are expecting that there will be.

CHAIR: I would think so. There is a limited number of tourist sites, and one would imagine that this Parliament would be one of them. If staff go on leave, we may have fewer staff rather than more staff.

The PRESIDENT: With regard to the attendants, who will be the critical staff obviously, Mr Pringle has just informed me that almost all of them will be on duty during the period.

CHAIR: Could they in some way incorporate guided tours for certain hours?

The PRESIDENT: There are guided tours now, as you know. Are you suggesting that a sign be placed at the front of the building?

CHAIR: Yes, to indicate the times of the tours, so that if people miss one of the tours they can return later.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that is certainly a suggestion.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: With regard to security arrangements in the Parliament, how much is allocated for the private security firm employed by the Parliament at present?

The PRESIDENT: That is covered by Joint Services, which I really cannot comment on.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: For what reason?

The PRESIDENT: It is not covered by the Legislative Council.

CHAIR: I am sure that if something really worried a member, he or she could write to Mr Speaker. I do not think what is happening is a secret. It is just the protocol of the upper House committees.

The PRESIDENT: It is in fact true that the expenses for security will be slightly higher than they were.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Are there plans to further privatise security services?

The PRESIDENT: No.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Therefore, why is there an increase?

The PRESIDENT: There will be a new manager of security, and we have written a new job statement for that manager. We are also looking to upgrade the management and the personnel in the security area, so that there is more emphasis on the client relationship than with security as such, in that there needs to be more understanding of Parliament House as a public building. We are not moving towards private contracting, because most of the things that we want in a security service are best had with long-serving security people who are aware of the way in which the Parliament operates. Interviews are soon to be held for the manager's position.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: That is the manager employed by the Parliament, who will also oversee the security firm that the Parliament has employed?

The PRESIDENT: The majority of the staff here are employed by the Parliament. Only a small number of staff are employed by the security firm.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is the Serjeant-at-Arms the manager of the security staff?

The PRESIDENT: We have three contract positions, and I think there are 15 security staff altogether.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You have said that only three of them are from a private security firm?

The PRESIDENT: Yes. And we are not seeking to extend that in any way.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I pause, because I have seen a lot of people wearing the Chubb Security jackets—certainly a lot more than three.

The PRESIDENT: Perhaps it is effectively three full-time positions. The Building Services manager, who is also the security manager at the moment, may be able to provide the figures.

Mr BENNETT: I also act as the manager, Parliamentary Security Services. I have acted in this position for about two years. The position is about to be filled. Therefore the salary of the new manager needs to be covered. The establishment of in-house security officers is 15. However, there have been 12 for some time. The shortfall is made up by the contract staff, which is usually three at the front of the House and a part-time officer to cover shift relief mid-afternoon, so that person works four hours. That is why you would have seen the fourth person.

The plan that Madam President mentioned is the future staffing directions plan, which has been with the Presiding Officers and has been approved in principle. The purpose of that plan is to move away from a police-type arrangement of security guards within Parliament House and to join entities and agencies such as the State Library, the Art Gallery and the Museum, which have information officers who act in a security role. However, their public relations people are well trained, and that level of person has to be paid a grade or so higher than we pay now. There is a quite extensive training program involved, which is why more funds would be required.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I turn to some disability issues. The ramp is excellent news, but I wish to relate an experience with a parliamentary visitor in a wheelchair. The taxi dropped him outside Parliament House, in Hospital Road, and it was difficult for him to enter the building because there is no ramp at the back. I understand that he was wheeled into the car park and put into a lift. A simple, quick solution to that problem would be to erect a sign directing taxis to drop people in wheelchairs downstairs. Security staff and attendants could be briefed about that. I understand that buildings are required to have a disability action plan governing access to lifts, lighting and other things that I admit I do not know the details of. The points are set out and buildings are required to comply with that standard. Are we working on such a plan?

The PRESIDENT: I have asked the Clerk to conduct an audit of disability issues in the Parliament, which is under way.

Mr BENNETT: We have a draft disability action plan that was prepared by the rehabilitation coordinator. I sent a copy of that plan to the Clerk of the Parliaments today in response to his request. I have also supplied a copy of the environmental audit, which is covered in the waste management plan of the Parliament. Those areas are covered by two recent and relevant documents. Someone with a disability wishing to enter the Parliament building from Hospital Road normally rings first. Taxis are then waved through, they go to level four and unload the passenger who is cared for by the attendant staff.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I appreciate that my visitor was probably unlucky, but I wondered whether other people had had a similar experience and how we could avoid the problem in the future.

CHAIR: Perhaps a memo could be sent to the taxi companies explaining the procedure and the fact that taxis can access the car park.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Leaving aside the continuing controversy about Independent members having additional staff, one impact of that arrangement was that the size of Independent members' offices was increased. I cannot help but notice that, in addition to having room for their staff, Independent members have a great deal more space in which to store the endless amounts of paper that come with a member's job. If you visit those of us who are not Independent members, you will find that we are forced almost onto the balcony as we constantly move in more paper. Does the Parliament have any plans to assist members meet the storage requirements for committees? Frankly, if I have a visitor to my office, I need a couple of minutes notice to find somewhere to stack all the boxes so that my visitor has room to sit down. I do not have that problem on the odd occasions when I visit Ms Lee Rhiannon or the Hon. Dr P. Wong: I simply saunter into their offices and there is plenty of space. This is not an attack on them, but we are reaching the stage when something serious will have to be done to help members handle paper.

I have one suggestion. I understand that one of the standing committees is trialling a machine that allows paper to be scanned and held electronically in what is called PDF file format. If some of the committee

papers that I receive were delivered to me in electronic form rather than on hard copy, I would be able to stick it on a CD Rom, which would not take up nearly as much space as the endless lever arch files that I have in my office.

The PRESIDENT: You have obviously raised several issues. The extra space for Independents arises out of the configuration of the eleventh floor. Because independents have two staff members, they cannot possibly be in a one-office set-up, so they end up in a two-office set-up and technically have a bit more room than a backbencher. I sympathise with you absolutely and totally about the problem of storing documents. I have solved that problem by hiring a garage in Marrickville—there is some room there and I offer it to you. However, it is very inconvenient when you need a document and realise that it is in your garage in Marrickville. I was surprised to discover that there is no storage here for members.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: There are no archives.

The PRESIDENT: I had my papers in archives boxes in the corridor for quite a long time until the previous Whip had a fit. Hence I hired the garage. The electronic option will certainly be investigated. We requested funding from Treasury for imaging hardware and software as part of our computer assets acquisition, but we were not successful. However, we will continue to try for that as I have enormous sympathy for backbenchers, in particular, because of the lack of storage space.

CHAIR: It may be possible for individual members to indicate their preference to the committee secretariats.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I do not think they can deliver it that way yet.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: May I make one small suggestion. It is wonderful to receive the pinks and greens of *Hansard* so early each morning. That is fantastic for staff in this place. However, I thought we could save money in respect of the red pamphlet. As *Hansard* is available on Lotus Notes, I believe we could do without it—although I appreciate that some members would probably want to receive it. Could the default position be that we do not receive it unless it is requested?

The PRESIDENT: I have exactly the same feeling; I never ever look at an orange pamphlet—that is what I call it—but I look at the pinks and greens all the time; they are really used. I think we should circulate a memo saying that members will not receive *Hansard* on hard copy unless they request it. Most members would not request it because it is available on computer anyway.

CHAIR: You could enclose a reply form and members could choose whether they want to receive it. The final copy is the accurate copy; the pinks and the greens are not necessarily correct—that is the danger.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I know that.

The PRESIDENT: We remember when they tried to take the pinks from us and there was an uprising. I think every member of the Legislative Council signed the petition. They are used and they are carried around physically.

CHAIR: A memo and attached form could be sent out with the red pamphlet. Some members would certainly want them. You should not stop sending them automatically.

The PRESIDENT: We will do that. I have an answer to an earlier question about the scanners. The President's Technology Advisory Group, which is chaired by the Hon. A. B. Kelly, recently endorsed the establishment of a scanning station on level 11 for use by all Legislative Council members. It is anticipated that it will be operational shortly. I understand that the use of scanners in the Legislative Assembly is a prototype arrangement to see whether they would be suitable for us.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I have hardware at home that is similar to what is about to be installed on level 11. Frankly, it is not very useful for large amounts of documents because it is not fast enough. It is quite handy if you want to make an image of a couple of pages but, for practical purposes, you need something a bit faster. That hardware does seem to be around. The final copies of committee reports, for example, are delivered to members electronically without much difficulty and I have received transcripts of *Hansard* delivered to me electronically. Having submissions imaged seems to be the most difficult thing—and they amount to many pages.

CHAIR: Has the committee of which you are chairman made a firm decision on the model?

The Hon. F. J. RYAN: We are conducting a trial, which I anticipate will be concluded by the end of the month. It will be in the attendants' room on Level 11 and a decision will be made after that.

CHAIR: What must be taken into account is that it is sufficiently fast or it is a heavy duty model with a greater capacity than the private members' scanner.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I have one final question regarding *Hansard*. When the committee I chair, the Select Committee on the Increase in Prisoner Population, meets when the House is not sitting, I notice that the transcript is provided by contractors. They provide a good service and I do not question that, but it seems strange to the committee that that should occur at a time when the House is not sitting. One wonders what the *Hansard* staff, who usually provide that service, are doing, given that, one would have thought, it would be cheaper to simply use them rather than hire new staff to do that task.

The PRESIDENT: As you would know, we have a lot of committees. They may in fact be reporting other committees. But if you want a more detailed answer to that, I will take it on notice.

CHAIR: We do not have the Acting Editor of Debates here?

The PRESIDENT: No. I was trying to reduce to a minimum the number of officers who were kept back.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Has there not been constant controversy about whether we have an Editor of *Hansard* or an Acting Editor of *Hansard* or something of that nature?

The PRESIDENT: That is being dealt with.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I am seeking a time line on the environmental audit and the audit for disabilities issues for this place.

The PRESIDENT: We received the report today, so I will be working on that for the next few weeks.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Is that the disability report?

The PRESIDENT: And the environmental report.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: They are both back?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

CHAIR: That brings us to the end of the estimates committee hearings. We thank you very much for attending, Madam President. We thank the financial controller, the Clerk of the Parliaments, and other departmental staff. I am sorry that we have not questioned the Librarian. That is not because of lack of interest. It must be because the members are happy.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
