

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Monday, 16 May 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O’Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Mr Colin Brooks MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,

Mr Nazih Elasmr MLC, President of the Legislative Council,

Ms Trish Burrows, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services,

Ms Bridget Noonan, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and

Mr Andrew Young, Clerk of the Legislative Council, Parliament of Victoria.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

We welcome the Presiding Officers and the Clerks. We thank you for your time today. We invite you to make a brief presentation, and this will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Mr BROOKS: Thank you, Chair. We appreciate the opportunity to come and appear before the committee. I know you have had a long day, so we will try to condense our 3-hour submission down to two. We will run through this presentation. I think we have 5 minutes. Last year we ran over time, as we did the year before. I will not labour each point, so I might move through it pretty quickly and allow time for members to ask their questions.

The first few slides just give an overview for the committee of the parliamentary appropriation. That pie chart gives you an idea of where the bulk of the appropriation is expended.

Next slide. I just wanted to recap the response of the parliamentary organisation to the COVID-19 pandemic. I think most members are aware through their involvement here in the Parliament of the work done by the people here at the Parliament to support members in continuing to perform their roles. That is a challenge all organisations have faced but one that I think we handled pretty well here at the Parliament in terms of the staff who supported us. Do you want to jump in, President?

Mr ELASMAR: Thank you, Speaker. Again, good afternoon and thanks for giving us the opportunity. Community engagement—as you see there, the Aboriginal Change Makers education resource launched. I will not go through it all, but we have done a lot of support and advice for people. We still continue to support the parliaments of Fiji, Tuvalu and Nauru. Also there was a presentation for the National Week of Deaf People and a new suite of resources developed for members to support them during visits to schools.

Mr BROOKS: Thanks, President. Just some of the achievements over the past year: completion of the chamber audio upgrade—members probably have not noticed, except for the new microphones in the chamber, but there was a lot of work, and if you were in the building in a non-sitting week over the period that this stuff was changed over, the seats were pulled out and all of the equipment was replaced and the wiring was

replaced—as a former electrician, a very impressive project; our *Gender Equality Action Plan* submitted on time; an EBA negotiated for electorate officers—and I should say at this point, just put on the record, the appreciation of the Presiding Officers and, I am sure, all members for the work that our electorate officers have been doing and continue to do; the *Disability Action and Inclusion Plan*; and the reconciliation action plan, which has been endorsed by Reconciliation Australia.

This slide—I will not go through each of those—just goes to the service delivery and facilities delivered to members to ensure they are able to perform their roles. Electorate office relocations are an important part—refurbishments and making sure that members have accessible offices to their local communities and that they are fit for purpose for the work that members do.

Members are aware of the works going on here at Parliament. The big project is obviously the stonework restoration project. Stage 12 has been completed. Stage 13, you would be happy to hear, is the last stage of the stonework restoration project. That is underway at the moment, so once that is finished, that will be it. There is also the east wing project, which has a number of benefits—the prime being the replacement of the fire stairs and the installation of two OH&S-compliant lifts.

Obviously one of our key objectives is to keep our people safe. That includes members, the public and our staff, and so a key area for us has been the electorate offices, ensuring that we roll through our security upgrades at members' offices. That just gives you an outline of the number of offices that we are working through. There is obviously that graph at the bottom which shows you that there was a bit of a spike in security incidents at electorate offices towards the end of last year.

Cybersecurity—I will not go into great detail on these two slides for a number of reasons, but I understand there has been a drop-off in phishing emails coming through to the parliamentary system but an uplift in other malicious content through emails and internet contact. I will move on through that one as well.

Priorities for the next financial year predominantly focus on continuing a range of projects that are already underway. They are listed up there: continuing to make sure we have a safe workplace for staff, members and visitors; the election and the opening of the new Parliament is a key piece of work that the parliamentary organisation has to undertake—we have had the boundary redistribution as well; continued administration of the new VIRTIPS system; cybersecurity upgrades; and more security upgrades. I should just say that, whilst I do not want to talk in great detail around security upgrades, there is a major security uplift both in the precinct and electorate offices underway, and I have talked about the east wing upgrade and the refurbishment of electorate offices with security overlays.

Just before I hand over, Chair, if that is okay, I should also introduce Trish Burrows, who is the new Secretary of DPS. I am not sure if members here have had the chance to meet Trish, but she has just started.

Ms BURROWS: It is day 10.

Mr BROOKS: It is day 10—no, she is not counting. I want to welcome Trish. I am not sure she will know all the answers to the questions you have after 10 days, but we can see.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Everything is going to be your fault, Trish.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, and in the first instance I will hand to Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. I do not know if it is a question to the Speaker or Ms Burrows. I do want to, noting the importance of talking in general terms, talk a little bit about security. I do accept the need to talk in general terms, but it is a conversation I think, broadly speaking, we should be having. The detail provided showed incidents rising over the last three years, if I read it right, from 107 to 205 to 263. I read that as a substantial increase from pre-COVID levels. Noting that substantial increase, is that only electorate office-related incidents? Would that include, for example, a member reporting an incident in the community?

Mr BROOKS: My understanding is that is the total number of incidents reported on our system, Noggin, which you would be aware of. Our security approach is being led by a new chief security officer. That is a position that has been created given the importance we have placed on the security frame, if you like. We understand that it is not just the precinct, it is members' safety in their electorate offices and of course the safety

of the members of public and the staff as well. One of the key aspects of our approach to security is a strong partnership with Victoria Police and being able to work in partnership with them. When we have looked at the most successful approaches in other places it has been that relationship between parliamentary security and police, working together and sharing information around potential threats, so that is a key part of our approach.

There is an investment at the moment into a security uplift here in the precinct and, as I mentioned, at electorate offices. I think most members would be aware of the security interface approach at electorate offices. I will not detail them here in public, but I think members are aware of them. Here in the precinct you will have seen many of the security improvements or changes that have occurred, and I just place on record that there will be some further changes. I do not think they create a great burden on members' access and the ability to do their job, but I would say that there will be some noticeable changes over the next 12 months or so in terms of that approach.

One of the things we will do is take those changes through the House Committee before we implement them just so that the House Committee has an understanding of what they are and can raise any concerns about them. Ultimately the Presiding Officers have to bear responsibility for these changes, so we cannot say we will not implement them the way we need to implement them based on expert advice, but we will take them through the House Committee and where we can consult with all members.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, just on that, Speaker, were you talking about this building or electorate offices as well?

Mr BROOKS: The electorate office security uplift is already underway, so the current phase is a rollout that is continuing. In terms of the changes here at the precinct, those changes will go through the House Committee.

Mr NEWBURY: There are two differences I think that I most noticed between the federal system and the state system when it comes to security. One of them is a proactive approach to helping members in terms of their homes. I do not want to go into this in any detail, but there is a clear difference in the two systems, and I think that is something that we should be looking at. Secondly, I think that there is—well, there is—a difference at law between protection of federal members and state members. On that second point I wondered whether perhaps the department had ever looked at that difference at law in any way, because I do think when there is a difference it is worth assessing what benefits that may or may not have.

Mr BROOKS: In terms of the last point you raised, I think you have raised that before. I think it is probably timely that we ask our security advisers for an opinion on that. It is worth looking at. I cannot give you a guarantee as to what the advice will be, but it is definitely a suggestion worth putting to them to see. Your first question was around—

Mr NEWBURY: There is a proactivity federally in relation to homes, and obviously there is a cost element to that, but without going into any detail, I think that it is warranted.

Mr ELASMAR: May I, Speaker? Thanks for your question, but the head of security arrangements was looking at this to see—

Mr NEWBURY: Terrific. I just thought that it was the opportunity to raise both of those points in the last few seconds as quite stark differences that might be worth considering.

Mr BROOKS: Just to add to the President, currently members' homes are covered by DPC and Parliament looks after here and electorate offices, and we are looking to better coordinate that.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Speaker and President, parliamentary officers and department officials for your attendance. I too would like to pick up on the security part. Budget paper 3 at page 129 details the investments that are being made into that: \$3 million for 2022–23 and \$600 000 for 2023–24. The line item states 'protective security upgrades and service enhancements'. I was just hoping, following on from your presentation as well, you would be able to take us through exactly what that money is being spent on.

Mr BROOKS: Yes, and again I think, Mr Maas, it is difficult to outline specifically each item because I think in a public forum we are sharing information that we would generally like to keep in-house. Maybe it is something that we could share in writing with the committee in a confidential way at some point in the future. That might satisfy the request for information in a way that we know is not being shared too widely. But just in the general sense, as I mentioned before, a key part of that is the security interface at electorate offices. It is about training, so making sure people are aware of different potential dangers, and it is about the security uplift here in the precinct itself. You will have noticed some of them and, as I mentioned, there will be some further security upgrades as well.

Mr MAAS: Okay. Given the broad nature of the discussion then, is there anything you could elaborate on in terms of the technology base that would go with that that the Parliament is considering?

Mr BROOKS: Look, I suppose just generally, we are looking at improvement in terms of our management of electronic data, so management of CCTV, numberplate recognition, those sorts of things. I will not go any further than that, but they are some of the key areas we are looking at.

Mr MAAS: Sure. I personally have noticed the new chief of security's efforts being filtered through other staff. They have really been very helpful to my office in particular. I just want to know: how is that training being delivered, and is there scope for extra personnel in-house, for instance?

Mr BROOKS: I think we are looking at recruiting more people in the security team, and training up of electorate officers is really important. I know that just as part of the routine engagement between the security team and electorate officers, my electorate office got visited the other day and my staff found it really useful. I think that is a great approach because the security team members are able to ask what sort of security improvements that people are interested in and what sort of measures they are not sure about and tailor the discussion and the training to each of those people in the office. I have got a number of new staff in my office, and they found it really useful.

Mr MAAS: Okay. I might leave that there. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Barton.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Speaker, President and the rest of the team, thank you. I actually have a question for Mr Young, if I may. Additional funding has been approved in 2021–22 and 2022–23 to ensure adequate resourcing of the Council's committees for the 59th Parliament. When it comes to ongoing adequate funding of the Legislative Council committees, can you outline for this committee what, if any, other funding limitations there are now and into the future?

Mr YOUNG: Thanks, Mr Barton. Last year the Council submitted through the Presiding Officers an ERC funding bid for increased funding for Council standing committees because prior to that, the year before, our appropriation was \$5.7 million and that was to cover all aspects of the Council department—not just committees of course but also the chamber, our engagement with agencies, community engagement et cetera. To acknowledge the response from government, which I should do, we received extra funding as a result of the ERC bid last year and we were appropriated \$6.4 million in last year's appropriation Bill, and it is \$6.6 million in this year's appropriation Bill. But the difficulty for us is that that expires at June 2023, and I would contend that the need for Council committees will continue well into the future and it goes to a structural problem of the budgeting for the Parliament that we have that sort of uncertainty around the funding base for all the departments, not just the Council—but I guess it is highlighted for the Council in terms of the Council committees.

If you look at the last three years, the Council standing committees have completed 22 inquiries. They have still got five underway. They have done things like inquiries into the criminal justice system, homelessness, Victoria's road toll—these are the sorts of inquiries which might well if they were a royal commission or another agency tasked with these sorts of things receive budgets of tens of millions of dollars. But it just goes to a structural weakness I think in the way that Parliament's funding is set, and that is probably a much bigger question. But, as I say, I do need to acknowledge the fact that the government did provide some extra funds for the Council in response to that ERC submission.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Mr Young. Do you see any structural problems when it comes to the way this funding is allocated to committees across the Parliament more generally?

Mr YOUNG: Yes. Look, I think it just goes to the lack of financial independence in our parliamentary systems. And it is not just in the Victorian Parliament, it is across all the Australian parliaments. Most jurisdictions overseas—Westminster jurisdictions like Canada, Scotland, the UK—have internal commissions or committees of parliamentarians that work with the officials of the Parliament to set the relevant budgets for the departments, which would include of course the consideration of what committees need. And they would also have different processes for the departments being accountable, because departments have to also be accountable. I think in some ways we are an immature system in Australia in that sense, even though we are a very mature parliamentary system in many other ways. So I think it is a very big issue not only for this committee but for the Parliament generally as to what the future of that type of funding approach should be and who is making decisions, rather than the Parliament going cap in hand to the executive for funding, because that really is not what the model should be in a Westminster system.

Mr BARTON: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Barton. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, President and officials. It is really terrific to have you all here—and Speaker, sorry. I would like to discuss the Parliament’s engagement, and in particular I will refer you to budget paper 3, page 371, where you have got a list of the departmental objectives, one of which is to ‘inform and engage with the community’. I am interested in perhaps exploring how the Parliament is meeting this objective. Whomever?

Mr ELASMAR: Let me start with, first of all, as I said before, the community engagement. Let us talk about the Aboriginal Change Makers education resource, in partnership with Worawa Aboriginal College, and then we have done online events to connect with diverse communities. A couple of months ago I had the honour to launch a new group which is called You, Me and MPs, created with the Eastern Community Legal Centre. Then there is STEM and Society is science, technology, engineering and maths; and a regular news bulletin about Parliament in Auslan. We also provide opportunities for young people via our Youth Associate program, with our first-ever deaf youth associate who worked on accessibility projects, such as our Auslan news bulletin and parliamentary vocabulary in Auslan. In online professional development, a recent program attracted 170 participants from 165 schools, including 42 from regional and rural areas. Our Parliament Prize competition attracted more than 600 student entries in 2020–21. There was also a new initiative for youth engagement via our Parliament Express program, which provides opportunities to prepare news stories for Parliament and receive mentoring. We continue support for our twinned parliaments of Fiji, Tuvalu and Nauru. They are most of the things we do.

Mr BROOKS: Can I just jump in to add to that, because the President has run through them pretty comprehensively, to add my own extra bit of information. I think the Aboriginal Change Makers program has been really impressive. I do not know if members have had the chance to look at it; it is on the website. It is a resource for Victorian schools developed by the education unit here, highlighting a number of Aboriginal leaders who have led change processes. One of our key priorities is better engaging with our Indigenous people and building a better understanding of how the Parliament works. This is a really important piece of work. It is worth acknowledging Dr Lois Peeler from Worawa, who has led a lot of that work. We were not able to get out to the college at Healesville during COVID, but I think we are heading out there in the next few weeks to launch that program, so it has really received a lot of recognition as well.

And just the other one, which members will have probably seen, was the work of our deaf youth associate. People will have seen the Auslan bulletin, which I actually find quite useful because it gives you a very good summary of what has happened in the Parliament and different committees over the last little while, so that is a great piece of work as well.

Ms RICHARDS: I go out to schools a lot, like I bet everyone does, so I am going to access that before I go. I have got one in two weeks, so I will access that extra resource.

You have just spoken about the engagement with Victoria’s First People. I was wondering if you can update us on the status of the reconciliation action plan.

Mr BROOKS: Yes. So we are actually very close to being able to finalise that plan. This is a piece of work led by the three departments and a group of staff who are very committed, who have taken this work through. We have got artwork for the design, a design for the cover; that has been finalised, so we are actually now at the stage where the reconciliation action plan will go off to Reconciliation Australia for approval and endorsement. Further to that, members will be aware that we commissioned a piece of art by Tom Day, a well-known and respected Indigenous artist, which now hangs at the end of Premier's corridor. Most of those other works are in storage at the moment because of the building works, but that artwork still hangs there. Tom did some great work with Shepparton college while he was producing that piece of art, and I should—is that the buzzer winding me up?

The CHAIR: It is, but we are a minute or two ahead, so you can finish if you want.

Mr BROOKS: Sorry. Can I just add one more point which is really important, because we are going to lose this piece maybe in the next week or so, which is the William Barak portrait in the library. I do not know if many people know the story of William Barak, but I understand from reading books in the library that he saw the first Europeans come up the Yarra and watched his people eventually moved out to the Coranderrk Station. When he came into the Parliament—he led delegations I think at least two or three times to raise issues about the conditions at Coranderrk. At least one of those times he was turned away from the front of our building. So the painting, the portrait, was sent from here to the state library in the 1920s or 30s, we think, and we thought that it was important that that portrait be, if it could, brought back to the Parliament and probably the respect that he should have been shown be at least shown to his portrait.

We have got a group of Wurundjeri elders coming in in the next few weeks as well to have a look at the portrait, but I think unfortunately our loan of that portrait—even though I suspect and would like to say we own it, we cannot prove that—ends and it goes back to the state library in the next couple of weeks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Before I hand to the Deputy Chair, Speaker, I do want to ask about one of the wonderful things that this Parliament does, and I know the federal Parliament does it as well, which is engage with younger nations in terms of their democracies. You know, I have seen behind the scenes the relationships that the parliaments, both here and in Canberra, do develop with other countries. Noting what recently happened with the Solomon Islands, is there a role perhaps for parliaments to continue that work in terms of explaining how our democracy works, how our system of government works? Is there a role, do you think, in there?

Mr BROOKS: Yes, absolutely. Thanks for that question, Mr Newbury. I think one of the unheralded pieces of work is what we call here the twinning program, where parliaments in Australia and New Zealand are twinned with smaller parliaments in the South Pacific. We are twinned with Fiji, Tuvalu and Nauru. Tuvalu, when you think of it, is a series of islands and atolls with about 10 000 to 12 000 people in terms of population—so a very small population but really important to us. Our relationship with them, with Fiji and with Nauru is really important, so we put a lot of work into working with the clerks and the organisations of those parliaments to bolster their democracies, if you like, to ensure that they have any support that we can provide them, and learnings, and at the same time also learn from them what we can as well.

I know that Andres Lomp, who is our community engagement manager, is well regarded in the South Pacific and in other parliaments for his community engagement work, leading in this relationship building. I might ask Andrew Young. Mr Young, do you want to add to that, on the twinning work?

Mr YOUNG: Yes. Certainly, Speaker. Thanks. And in fact Andres is in Fiji today, at the parliament, at their request, assisting them with a community engagement strategy. In fact our Usher of the Black Rod, Sally West, is also over there, meeting with Fiji Parliament, UNDP and the high commissioner to further the relationship that we have not only with Fiji Parliament and the UNDP but also the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, who provide funding specifically for the Fiji Parliament project. Every indication is that that will continue into the future, that funding round, which is not only a good vote of confidence for what this Parliament is doing in Fiji but also I think fits into a more strategic goal for Australia in the Pacific. If you look at the last few months alone, despite COVID, we have managed to run six separate programs with Fiji, including masterclasses on bill inquiries, which actually included other parliaments of the Pacific as well; some

things around people resources and COVID for staff in those parliaments managing COVID; standing orders training for members; annual reporting during COVID; and a masterclass on engaging young people. It just shows the types of interests those parliaments have got in not just getting on top of basic procedures of running a Parliament but now becoming more sophisticated in trying to promote democratic principles in their nations.

I think it is one of the better things this Parliament does, to be part of that, which is a cross-department effort. It is all three departments—DPS, the Assembly and the Council—all contributing, increasingly DPS because of the skills that are required in IT, Hansard and finance et cetera in those parliaments. That is just a little bit of a flavour of what is going on.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you, both. Danny.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you. Mr Young, can I continue on with you and just go back to some answers you gave to Mr Barton? The budget line item for 'Parliamentary investigatory committees', what does that cover? Is it only the joint committees?

Mr YOUNG: That is correct. It is a separate appropriation for the now five joint committees, since the pandemic oversight committee commenced. At its height, just a handful of years ago, there were 13 joint committees, but of course there were then some changes to the legislation. As the two house committee systems developed there are now three in the Assembly and three in the Council.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So how are they funded, the individual house committees—privileges and the like?

Mr YOUNG: The individual house committees are funded out of the departmental appropriations. As I said before, if you look at the current appropriation for the Council, it is \$6.4 million. So I have to fund not only the rest of the department but also the standing committees out of that, whereas the joint committees' appropriation just has to fund the five joint committees.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So for any funding that is required—say, a committee needs to engage a consultant or whatever—for the house committees, do they go to the Speaker or the President?

Mr YOUNG: That would be me, and Bridget in the case of the Assembly.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And for the joint committees that is just done through whatever budget we have got?

Mr YOUNG: Yes, and that has more involvement from the Presiding Officers because of their financial responsibility for joint committees.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes. Thank you, everyone, for being here this evening. Just following on with the departmental objectives, specifically 'Support members to fulfil their roles'—and that is on budget paper 3, page 371—given the challenges of COVID-19, how did Parliament pivot to meet that objective?

Mr BROOKS: Delving back into a little bit of history here, I think it is important to just put on the record again, which I might have done at last year's hearing, our thanks to our kitchen team. I will kick off by talking about the meals program, which was such a valuable program for everyone involved—keeping people here at work and also supporting vulnerable Victorians who, for whatever reason during that period of the pandemic, were not able to access food. One of the interesting things from talking to some of the charity partners was the different sorts of people who were accessing those meals—international students, people who had just lost work. It was quite a different group of people than they normally deal with.

The Parliament instigated its incident management team, in terms of the governance as we went into the pandemic and dealt with COVID-19, and then each of the parliamentary departments set about making sure that their staff were safe and supporting the operation of the Parliament through the lockdowns, but I might—

Mr ELASMAR: If I can add to this, Ms Taylor, there was a staff survey on their wellbeing as well, held by the Parliament, and training provided to staff. I would like to thank Sharon, who brought People Matter

together. The COVID subcommittee sent communication to all members as well, and the work health and safety team have set up a wellness hub, EAP services and regular manager check-ups. Anyway, would Andrew like to add anything to this?

Mr YOUNG: No, thanks, President.

Mr ELASMAR: Bridget?

Ms NOONAN: Thanks, Presiding Officers, and thanks, members. It is an opportunity to get on the record my appreciation for members in working with us during the various stages of the pandemic. It gave us an opportunity to try a few things in the chamber—some worked, some very much did not. But it was an opportunity to get feedback from members about whether this in fact was a better way of delivering services. I think Assembly members probably got sick of emails from me saying, ‘And here’s a second-reading speech’—

Mr NEWBURY: Never. We loved them.

Ms NOONAN: rather than having them delivered in hard copy, but it proved to us that actually that was a way that members preferred to have access to documents. So we were able to, by necessity, try some new things procedurally.

Some of the sitting arrangements motions we drafted were more successful than others, but it was useful that members were able to say, ‘Well, actually, if you have to draft that again, could you do it a slightly different way?’. So I think that was a good way of working for us, but if I never have to send members another email about registering their opinion on a division, I am sure we will all be very pleased about that.

Ms TAYLOR: Just on the Parliament kitchen, has there been a continuation of using the Parliament kitchen to provide food for charity in non-sitting sessions? I just want to know.

Mr BROOKS: When the program ceased at the end of the financial year our head of the catering unit, Paul McConville, reached out and consulted with each of the charity partners about what their ongoing needs might be. That differed between each of the charity partners. I cannot remember which one, but one of them said, ‘What we really need is to train up some baristas for our own cafe’, so those people came into the Parliament and learned how to use the coffee machine from the experts who make great coffee here at the Parliament. So a range of those different measures were put in place where people were supported. I know that the new Secretary has got some ideas as well about how we can improve our relationship with some of those people in the charitable sector.

Ms TAYLOR: That is very good to hear; good stuff. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mr O’Brien.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Thank you. Can I put a couple of questions, which I assume you will probably have to take on notice, perhaps to Ms Burrows. DPS headcount has grown by 27 per cent in the budget and by 102 per cent since 2014–15. I was wanting to know what the major areas are of headcount growth—so the specific skill set, I guess, and positions—and also what costs outside salaries have grown the most. I would assume you will need to take that on notice. Then the third part of that is: when was the last review of the mix of contractor versus employee, particularly for IT? I do not know if anyone else can answer that; it is probably a bit hard to ask you, Ms Burrows.

Ms BURROWS: I will have to take all three of those on notice, if you would not mind. Thank you for the question, but I will absolutely get back to the committee.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Sure. One that is close to my heart, and I reckon most of my colleagues will have the same thing: who makes the decision about what is paid for by DPS and what is paid for out of our EO budgets? For example, rent, gas, electricity et cetera are paid by DPS; for some unknown reason air conditioning reservicing, security, fire hydrants are paid for out of our budget. Who makes those decisions?

Mr BROOKS: I think the short answer is—unless you want to, Ms Burrows—

Ms BURROWS: No, you are right.

Mr BROOKS: the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal. And I think there was a recent change—when I say ‘recent’, it might have been 12 months ago—where some maintenance costs were changed so that they were picked up by the Parliament as opposed to the EO and comms budget.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Righto. Take it up with them?

Mr BROOKS: Yes.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Do not get me started on VIRTIPS. Look, to be fair, the most recent changes have been much better, but for the record, and it is not really a question, some things—for example, that three types of contact must be provided on anything we pay for. So I have got 19 footy clubs, and I sponsor every one of them. I support every one of them through an advertising sign, and I have got to go through and put a sticker on every one of them because apparently now my website is not enough for someone to contact them. These are the sort of bureaucratic things that drive my staff and me nuts, and I reckon I will see some nodding heads from even my Labor colleagues—anyway.

Can I just ask a question about security. The federal Parliament, I understand, has its own security force. Has that model been considered for Victoria rather than employing protective services officers?

Mr BROOKS: You mean in terms of the Victoria Police PSOs?

Mr D O’BRIEN: Yes.

Mr BROOKS: My understanding is that the—

Mr D O’BRIEN: Sorry, no—instead of a private security firm.

Mr BROOKS: My understanding is the federal Parliament have federal police on external parts of the building and their own security team inside the building and maybe some contractors—I am not sure. Of course here we work with Victoria Police; the PSOs have a similar role to the federal police in Canberra. And we have a security team here of our own employees, led by the chief security officer, and then we employ Wilson. We are actively considering whether we would be served by permanent employees at the Parliament, with an uplift capacity potentially with contracted security, but that is something we have asked the new Secretary to have a look at.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Okay, so that is actively being looked at—to bring it in house, effectively?

Mr BROOKS: Yes—only recently, though.

Mr D O’BRIEN: You mentioned, I think, the CCTV program for electorate offices. How many EOs now have CCTV?

Mr BROOKS: I will take that on notice. I think I did see the figure—

Mr ELASMAR: I think there are about 12 left, from memory.

Mr BROOKS: The President is saying he thinks there might be about 12 that are yet to be done.

Mr ELASMAR: About 12 offices left without CCTV.

Mr D O’BRIEN: They have not got it. Could I also get on notice the breakdown of the cost?

Mr BROOKS: Sorry?

Mr D O’BRIEN: What has that cost to roll that out to all the electorate offices?

Mr BROOKS: Yes.

Mr D O’BRIEN: This is sensitive, and you may also say it is DPC. But in terms of personal protective security for MPs has there been anyone require that other than ministers or the Leader of the Opposition, for example, and is that something that would be provided by Parliament if it was deemed necessary?

Mr BROOKS: Sorry, Andrew, you look like you are going to say something.

Mr YOUNG: Well, I think it might need clarification around what you mean, Mr O'Brien, in terms—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am talking about personal protection for a period of time due to threats, which would be considered by police, I am sure, as well as our—

Mr BROOKS: Can we take that on notice? I am not aware of one particular person or personal protection, but the answer that I could give you is probably better given to you in writing, not in a public forum.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, sure. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Speaker and President, for joining us—and representatives of the parliamentary departments. I want to go to the topic of school tours and in particular how important it is to connect with more than 2200 of our government, independent and Catholic schools in our system, bringing our system of Parliament and democracy to them and their education and learning. I refer to budget paper 3, page 376, which lists the Legislative Assembly's performance measures, referencing regional visits to schools, and I am wondering for the committee's benefit if you could elaborate a bit further on that and how often these occur.

Mr BROOKS: Can I just say, before handing over to Bridget—the tours team runs out of the Assembly; it is part of that cooperative framework here—what a fantastic job our tours team did even through the pandemic, where they moved to online provision of tours, which was great. I am sorry, Bridget, if I am stealing what you were going to say, but that has turned out to be a great function, because many schools in regional Victoria who were not otherwise coming to Melbourne anyway, to the Parliament, because of distance, are now able to access that online, which has been one of the few positives things to come out of the pandemic. But I might hand over to Bridget.

Ms NOONAN: Thanks, Speaker, and thanks, Mr Richardson. Our output measure to do with regional visits is five a year, and pre COVID we were often doing about six. COVID of course was a bit of a spanner in the works, but assuming life gets back to normal we are looking at doing four regional visits in the second half of this year—probably Warrnambool, Shepparton, Wodonga and Benalla; we have a giant map, and we rotate around the various jurisdictions—because it would be great to get back out there. But, as the Speaker indicated, as a bit of a workaround during COVID the team came up with the idea of online incursions. I think when I spoke to the committee last year I said I had a hunch that that service or that facility was tapping a need that we had not realised was there, and that is very much the case. When you look at students participating, the online incursion tour is our most heavily patronised or subscribed tour, so compared to school tours in the building we have had just over 3500 schoolchildren do an incursion since January compared to about 1500—I think that is about right—on site. So that says to me that that is a really useful facility, whether it is metropolitan schools or regional schools, and there certainly are a lot of regional schools from Western District, Gippsland and Mornington Peninsula participating in the incursions.

When we realised that incursions were here to stay we worked with our colleagues in buildings and grounds and the Hansard broadcast team to develop a very small but dedicated studio with a green screen just to give that service the professional context that it deserves—happy to give members a tour of that. And one of the other things that the incursions have allowed us to do in conjunction with some work the team did on the tours booking database is allow us to plug gaps with incursions. So if the chamber is out of action for building works or a function, the tours teams can very quickly put some more incursions on the online booking system. That in a sense makes teachers more self-sufficient because they can scroll through and select an incursion as well.

The other thing, while I think of it, that the online booking database has allowed us to do is get better data about who is making bookings, where they are coming from and that sort of thing. Hopefully when I am here next year I am able to talk about perhaps that data in more detail once we have been able to get into it a bit.

Mr RICHARDSON: How do schools go about accessing that incursion resource? Is there a limit on how much output there would be in each period?

Ms NOONAN: Yes. On a usual non-sitting week we would do three of those a day, but as I said we can do more if we are not able to use the chamber. We can convert a chamber school tour booking into an incursion. They can book themselves on our website, but they can also just phone up. If we are not able to offer them a metropolitan role play, we can negotiate that perhaps this is another service they would like instead. Because we are limited in the number of people we can have physically on a tour moving around in the building, what the incursion allows us to do is: you can deliver it to a class of three at a regional primary school or you can pack everyone into the school hall for 200. It can scale up and down quite easily.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Presiding Officers and your teams, for appearing this evening. I want to ask about the initiative parliamentary sitting resilience. It states:

Updated technologies will be implemented to enable members and their staff to remotely participate in Parliamentary proceedings in emergency situations.

Can you define 'emergency situations'? What is the thinking there?

Mr BROOKS: I think we were worried. The honest answer is we were worried in the midst of the pandemic that if there was a strain where it was deemed that it was more severe than we saw—you know, what if people cannot gather in proximity—how would the Parliament continue to operate? We grappled with some of those challenges with some of the health advice that was coming out at the time. What we wanted to do was to make sure that setting the constitutional issues around members needing to be present for votes or quorums aside, do we have the technological capacity to run a Parliament without that? I think the first thing to say is, a bit like the UK Parliament did, there is the Zoom option. I think the advice that we received—or the advice we did receive—was that we could stand up a version of the Parliament using Zoom on that basis. I am going to paraphrase the technical language that was used: I think it would be clunky but it would work. That is the first thing to say.

This resilience program that we put forward in the budget was a submission we put to government which was a more developed proposal with different systems that would not just help with parliamentary resilience but also assist members when they are engaging on committees and other things—the equipment would be of great use for members. We are going to continue to work on that and roll it out.

Mr HIBBINS: The technical capacity for MPs to be able to fully participate in Parliament, voting in particular—that is available or that will be enhanced with that initiative?

Mr BROOKS: I think that is the aim of the project that is listed in the budget papers. As I say, the concept of members needing to be present is the requirement that we grapple with constitutionally. I think at this point both houses have taken the view certainly in terms of the operation of the house that people should turn up, but we just wanted to make sure we had thought through all the different potential options.

Mr HIBBINS: Because obviously that is now still an ongoing issue, particularly for crossbench members, where pairing has not traditionally taken place. It is all part of convention—there are no formal rules. So obviously if crossbench members are ill or on leave for whatever reason, they cannot fully participate in Parliament. So essentially now the technology is there. It is about the houses deciding that they want to legislate or change the constitution or take that approach to make it happen.

Mr BROOKS: Yes. I have seen different pieces of advice on the constitutional question, and I think it is a matter for each of the houses to decide how they want to progress that matter. Obviously at the moment people have taken the view that it is better to tread carefully and not have that question sorted in the courts.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay.

Mr BROOKS: But I think one of the things that was good during the pandemic—this is a personal opinion—was the ability of members to Zoom into Parliament to make a contribution, if not vote. I would imagine that makes not just crossbench members but all members, particularly regional members who might have responsibilities and travel commitments, able to maybe make a contribution on an item that is on on the

Tuesday and then come to the Parliament on the Thursday when the matter might be before the house for a vote in the Assembly. So there have been some improvements, but I would not say it is perfect at this point.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. And for the benefit of all those people who are listening in, watching PAEC at this time of hour, changing the constitution to remove that doubt would essentially require the government to introduce legislation and for it to be passed by the—whatever the requirements are—the absolute majority or what have you to clarify that point.

Ms NOONAN: I think it is—do not quote me on this, I will have to come back and check—entrenched by referendum. No?

Mr YOUNG: No, I do not think that section is.

Ms NOONAN: Okay, yes. So it could be done by way of legislation, but I will double-check that.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. And thank you for appearing before the committee today. That concludes that time we have set aside for the consideration of the estimates with you. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

We thank all ministers and officers who have given evidence to the committee today, as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants. We also thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff who have looked after all of us today.

The committee will resume consideration of the 2022–23 budget estimates tomorrow. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.