

# VERIFIED VERSION

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2016–17

Melbourne — 13 May 2016

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Ms Sue Pennicuik

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

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#### Witnesses

Mr Robin Scott, Acting Minister for Police,

Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary, Department of Justice and Regulation, and

Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton, Victoria Police.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2016–17 budget estimates. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Acting Minister for Police, the Honourable Robin Scott, MP; Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation; and Mr Graham Ashton, Chief Commissioner of Police.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. Witnesses will not be sworn but are requested to answer all questions succinctly, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

Questions from the committee will be asked on a group basis, meaning that specific time has been allocated to members of the government, opposition and crossbench to ask a series of questions in a set amount of time before moving onto the next group. I will advise witnesses who will be asking questions at each segment.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

All written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way and cannot photograph, audio record or video record any part of these proceedings. Members of the media must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I now invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 10 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Mr SCOTT** — Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to present on the police portfolio. If there is one image that best captures our approach to this budget in Victoria Police, it is a picture of a room at Victoria Police Centre, police headquarters. This photo deserves to be in a history book, but I can tell you that it was taken earlier this week. It shows fax machines that Victoria Police still rely upon for some of their daily communication. It may surprise members that Victoria Police has developed a niche expertise in fixing fax machines. It is very hard to get external contractors to do this work. The 2016–17 budget delivers on our commitment to Victoria Police that they will have the resources they need, with over \$661 million of new funding.

The government's policing policy is to have a well-resourced police force, with a strong commitment to community engagement and smarter policing, which is critical to reducing crime, improving responsiveness and keeping the community safe. This budget delivers to the police the resources they need as a 21st century police force. This will ensure Victoria Police are equipped to protect the community and keep perpetrators accountable through better equipment, more specialists, new technology and more effective intelligence.

Victoria Police has been waiting for this investment for a very long time and this budget delivers on this need. As part of our \$596 million public safety package, this budget delivers a \$227.2 million investment in technology, including intelligence resources; new mobile technologies, such as tablets; and body-worn cameras. This will ensure police can better respond to family violence incidents and will directly address recommendations made by the royal commission. No doubt the Chief Commissioner will have more to add at a later opportunity. but I wanted members of the committee to be very clear what this investment means to Victoria Police.

The \$227.2 million investment in technology will make a significant difference to police members out on the road. Body-worn cameras will allow Victoria Police members to capture video evidence at the time and location of an incident. This directly responds to recommendation 58 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which asks Victoria Police to conduct a trial in two divisions. This budget goes beyond this recommendation and funds Victoria Police for a full deployment of this technology. By capturing video and audio of the scene

and interactions with victims and perpetrators, body-worn cameras will support better and more efficient justice outcomes and reduce trauma for victims of family violence.

Information is the lifeblood of policing. Police need the right information at the right time and at the right place to inform critical decision-making. This is a screenshot of what is likely displayed on a mobile device when police members speak with a person and conduct a search. I would be happy to give an example that will best highlight why we are making this investment.

In 2010 a report was made to Crime Stoppers about a man who had tried to obtain firearms. The information was entered into Interpose. The man later came into contact with the police on a number of occasions in relation to family violence and sexual assault incidents. Police members accessed LEAP for background information, which indicated that he had no prior criminal history and no registered firearms. Police members were unable to access Interpose due to limitations on the number of users at any one time. As a result, police members did not have access to critical information. The man was later involved in a murder-suicide with his three children, involving a firearm. The coroner recommended that Victoria Police ensure that investigating members are assisted and supported to obtain all information potentially relevant to an investigation in a timely way. This investment will bring together the multiple and separate information systems that Victoria Police currently use to manage information.

This graphic is a good example of the importance of mobile technology, which is the third aspect of our \$227.2 million investment. There are a number of manual steps involved currently when Victoria Police respond to an incident. As you can see, an incident involves returning to the police station, filling in forms, typing these forms into a database, faxing them off and then returning to patrol.

This graphic clearly demonstrates the number of steps and processes that will be removed as mobile technology is delivered. The time that a police officer will spend in a station filling in forms and faxing off paperwork is eliminated. Data from other jurisdictions such as New Zealand has shown that mobile devices can free up at least 30 minutes of a standard eight-hour police shift. For Victoria Police the cumulative benefit is equivalent to around 500 full-time equivalent of police time per year into front-line policing.

The \$596 million public safety package delivers on the Andrews government's promise to give police resources they need and have asked for to respond to gang-related crime, gun crime, terrorist threats and family violence. These investments reflect advice from Victoria Police on the trends they are seeing, which are reflected in the crime statistics.

New police personnel funded in the budget include: 300 general duties officers, who will be deployed to the front line; 30 new officers and 2 support personnel for the anti-gang and illicit trafficking teams; 40 new public order response team officers and 4 support personnel to increase capacity to rapidly respond to incidents involving hostile crowds; 20 special operations group officers, increasing the capacity for Victoria Police to respond to high-risk incidents, including terrorist incidents; 26 specialist police and support personnel to operate a new 24/7 police monitoring and assessment centre; 24 additional forensic officers and staff for two new forensic hubs, who will be established in regional Victoria to enable police to fast-track investigations into ice and other drug trafficking; and 10 new fingerprint experts, technicians and support staff to allow police to better identify and target repeat offenders.

A heavily armoured vehicle, three bullet-proof vehicles and bomb robots for Victoria Police at specialist units, as well as the first stage of a new specialist operation training facility, will also be funded along with technology and new ballistic vests. The full deployment of 400 police custody officers, which were funded in last year's budget, will also be fast-tracked by six months to the end of 2017, further freeing up frontline resources.

We know how important it is to attract high-quality police officers to regional Victoria, ensuring that they have first-class facilities that are safe and reflect modern community expectations. That is why we have invested \$36.8 million to replace and refurbish facilities at stations across Victoria. This investment includes \$30 million to replace outdated facilities at Colac, Murtoa, Bright, Warburton, Mallacoota, Cowes and Corryong; \$2.94 million to refurbish 15 police stations; and \$3.9 million to replace and refurbish 10 police residences across Victoria.

The community crime prevention program provides a package of grants to build community engagement and capability in evidence-based crime prevention. The community crime prevention program is one of the most

efficient and effective crime prevention programs in Australia, according to a 2014 Australian Institute of Criminology evaluation and the parliamentary secretary's review of the program released in April 2016. The \$19.4 million budget initiative over two years renews the community crime prevention program, with increased emphasis on addressing the root causes of crime. The funding will provide more grants to assist communities experiencing high crime levels and disadvantage and to address emerging crime trends, expansion of the Communities that Care program, continuation of public safety infrastructure and community safety funding grants.

The government has also provided a major boost to Victoria's counterterrorism capability, with additional resources for Victoria Police to investigate reports of terrorism. The 2016–17 state budget provides \$62.9 million to strengthen Victoria's counterterrorism capability and capacity response. This was announced in November 2015 and included in the 2016–17 budget papers. Following the establishment of the Victoria Police counterterrorism command in September 2015, we did not wait for a budget cycle but provided Victoria Police with the resources that they required when they needed them. It also supports Victoria Police's cooperation with federal authorities through the joint counterterrorism teams, which include the Australian Federal Police and other partner agencies. In addition, our public safety package provides greater resources to Victoria Police's elite special operations group and critical incident response group. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. We will have government questions now until 2.23 p.m. Ms Ward for 11 minutes.

**Ms WARD** — Welcome, Minister. Welcome, everyone. Given that it is Friday afternoon and Ms Shing has already mentioned the running man, I do have a question to the Chief Commissioner, which is: I have seen Ambulance Victoria's version, I have seen your version, when are you going to stump up, not just drop the microphone but actually bust some moves yourself?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Thank you for the question. You obviously have never seen me dance. It would be more stumbling man than running man, I suspect. I thought it was better just to do something at the end of that video. We had a lot of interest from Victoria Police members to be involved, so it seemed like a quite good morale thing to do. Certainly internationally it has been amazing, the amount of inputs — different police forces participating. It was a bit of fun for people to see police as human beings, which is always good.

**Ms WARD** — I think so too. I think we have seen footage of police at festivals — someone busting a couple of moves along with people too, which I think is a fantastic way to show that, yes, police are human and that they do like to have fun.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, that is right.

**Ms WARD** — You are to be commended for that. But I do hope to see some moves.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — At the Blue Ribbon Ball, perhaps.

**Ms WARD** — If I can draw you to your presentation, Minister. You talk about delivering on the resources that Victoria Police need, in particular the public safety package. You have mentioned IT improvements, but you also talk about 300 frontline police being deployed across Victoria. What does that mean and how does this actually address the issues around attendance at front desks? How does this affect police opening hours? How does this help people in their own communities?

**Mr SCOTT** — There are a number of elements to that question. Firstly, you mentioned the 300 general duty officers who will be deployed to the front line. I may get the police commissioner to provide some further details, since of course it is the police commissioner's responsibility to make those deployments. We provide the resources but the Chief Commissioner makes the determinations for where they will be located. Many of these officers will be the first responders to any incident. Of course VPS staff and unsworn members definitely play an important role in dealing with crime, particularly in specialist areas such as forensics, but these 300 officers will be deployed, particularly on the advice I have had from the Chief Commissioner, and I will hand over to him in a second, in terms of where there is great need and emerging trends, particularly in geographic areas, around crime. I will get the Chief Commissioner to supplement.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Sure. In relation to the 300 members that are in that budget announcement for what is called frontline or first response duties, it is my intention that they will be allocated to areas of obviously the greatest need on rosters at police stations. The actual deployment model is taking a different approach to previous deployment models. We are revamping it. I have asked the police association, for example, to come into the room for that discussion as well and be part of that build, which has not happened before. We are going to have a model perhaps not dramatically different to what has been there in the past, but I do want to take into account population growth, calls for police service, demand and the types of calls for service, which we have not really looked at before, as well. Those calls for service have been a raw number. I want to actually have a look at the types of calls for service, what requires a more immediate response rather than even potentially a phone call followed up by a physical response — different aspects of that.

We are developing a capability plan at Victoria Police — the first year of that is due in the middle of the year — which is what I see as being a road map towards getting us in the direction of the blue paper, the Victoria Police blue paper. The actual deployment model forms a part of that. Whilst I do not have specifics yet until that is done — it is to be at the end of June — to knowing where those deployments will be, they will be mostly in our growth corridors to our stations that are the busiest at the moment. There will be a little bit of country policing deployment as well.

**Ms WARD** — Okay. Good.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — There are a couple of areas I think we could have a crack at there, but most of them will be going to those growth corridors — the south-east, the south-west, north-west and a little bit in the north-east as well.

**Ms WARD** — Yes. Great. Thank you.

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of counter hours and the issues that are related to police operating-station operating times, again, that is really a matter for the police commissioner, so I might get you to respond to those. We have provided the resources, but how they relate to those particular issues is again a decision for the Chief Commissioner.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. In relation to counter hours, I have taken an approach there where the responsibility sits with me under the Act to deploy police resources. When I commenced in the Chief Commissioner role, the message I was getting from my assistant commissioners was that they wanted more flexibility about the deployment onto rosters and the importance of having the police out visibly in the community. They wanted to try to minimise the amount of times that police were at the stations.

One of the duties that we felt that we could minimise was around spending time at the counter. We did some studies around what people come into the police stations for, and we found that the majority of the time people are coming into the police stations to have documents signed and witnessed. That was the main thing. Then there was another group that were coming for bail reporting, and then there was a much smaller group again of people that just want to come in and have a chat to the police officer about whatever issue they may want to talk about. We thought we would need to make sure that we provide that opportunity, but then do we need to provide it at every particular station.

I have given that flexibility to our assistant commissioners to make sure that there is a station nearby where that can be provided and where possible provide those. But if they felt that for particular crime operations or particular patrol operations that they needed to run, that I would give them that flexibility to not provide a counter service at some police stations. I wanted to make sure that there was a counter nearby, that there was a sign so that people could, if they go and see that it is not there, they know where to go. That was really important. I think we have still got some work to do to get that right. I still see signs up that we need to get better at, but it is in the early days of this process. When I am out talking to the community, I am certainly hearing that they want police to be visible, they want the police to be out in the suburbs responding quickly, and this gives us more availability.

**Ms WARD** — So it is not that the police station are closed or temporarily closed, it is that the police are actually out in the community with people.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. Quite often someone will come to a station we have not got a counter service at, they will see the sign and they will ring, and the patrolling vehicle will come to the station actually and have a chat to them about whatever it might be. That happens quite a lot. But for me, having that visible police presence is the most important thing. If people call for police service, we want to get some people there quickly. If they are within the confines of the station, that creates a time delay that I think I can avoid.

**Ms WARD** — In addition to the 300 general duty officers, what other sworn police, if any, are included in the budget package that has been announced?

**Mr SCOTT** — Okay. I am happy to respond to that question. There are 30 new sworn officers for the anti-gang and illicit trafficking teams. Obviously that will have a critical role in responding — —

**Ms WARD** — Sorry. They were the anti-gang — —

**Mr SCOTT** — And illicit trafficking teams. And 40 new public order response team officers to increase the capacity to rapidly respond to incidents involving hostile crowds. There are 20 new members of the special operations group who are sworn officers, and that is increasing the capacity of Victoria Police to respond to high-risk incidents, including terrorism incidents. There are some specialist police. I could give an exact number, but I might have to check. There are 26 total police and support personnel for the 24/7 Victoria Police Monitoring and Assessment Centre. Some of those are sworn officers, I am sure — —

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — A few are.

**Mr SCOTT** — Yes, there are a few. There is a small number of sworn officers in that group. That is to allow police to monitor and assess information immediately and respond quickly to major incidents. I might get the Chief Commissioner to supplement, but that is an additional capacity. There is the capacity that exists over a limited period of time, particularly for major events and over weekends, but this is an additional capacity which will give a 24/7 response.

**Ms WARD** — Are these officers considered to be front-line officers?

**Mr SCOTT** — I certainly consider people like the special operations group, people in anti-gang teams and those in the public order response teams, and in fact those operating and monitoring the assessment centre, on the front line. In fact if you talked about other investments which are outside of this package, which were earlier announced around the terrorism area — —

**Ms WARD** — What about unsworn support staff and fingerprint analysis?

**Mr SCOTT** — A good example is fingerprint experts are absolutely critical to the solving of crime. I might have the Chief Commissioner supplement, but they provide evidentiary support and allow crimes to be solved, and they are a very efficient use of resources. I think it is important to understand that in combatting crime, there is a range of roles to play, and it is not the policing of the 1960s or the 1950s. We are moving to a much more modern police force. Would you like to supplement, Chief Commissioner?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. In relation to what we call VPS, we do not use the term ‘unsworn’ because it has a negative connotation to my mind, so I describe it as VPS. The VPS support and the specialist support that are VPS officers is really critical to the work that we are currently providing. The forensic officers that the minister talked about out at forensics are not sworn police officers but experts in their particular scientific discipline. The 24-hour monitoring centre is probably a good example. It has concerned me that we have not had that capability. In a police force of our size, command should have a 24/7, seven-days-a-week, live monitoring centre so that if police are in one area, and the issue is escalating, that we can more quickly get the right support, the right specialist needs to them. Currently we do not do that 24 hours, 7 days a week. We do it at peak times, but we do not do it all the time. We need to do that.

But the unsworn specialists that go in there, we are increasingly trying to use, for example, social media to detect what is happening in the community. We are actually going to engage people that are experts at monitoring that — people younger than me that understand this and can monitor what is happening. If there are certain gangs or groups wanting to get together at a certain spot, we will know about that and be able to deal with that.

**Ms SHING** — It is part of a global trend too, is it not, Chief Commissioner?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. Certainly. We have been over to have a look at the New York police model, which is one of the best ones around. That is exactly what they are doing. They are getting that information fed out to the first response units really quickly. We want to do that. We want to have a more disciplined approach to that resource build at the time that it needs to be there, and that is what that will do as well. That is mostly VPS support specialists in there.

**Ms WARD** — Thank you, Chief Commissioner. Minister, if I could ask you to have a look at budget paper 3, page 97, there is quite a lot of investment in line items there around policing activities. How does this compare with recent budgets?

**Mr SCOTT** — It is a much more significant investment than has occurred in recent years. I can provide some figures to the committee. In terms of output versus asset this is a \$661.3 million investment. The previous year it was 261.3 and the year before that, the 14–15 year, was 137 million. This is asset and output — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Mr O'Brien until 2.34 p.m.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Chief Commissioner, you mentioned before that you are getting a report done on why people attend police stations.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Will that be publicly released or is it possible for the committee to get a copy of that?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We have certainly got data we can make available. We have been doing those at a number of different stations, just capturing data on what the community are coming in to talk about. We would be happy to do that.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — If you could provide that to the committee on notice, that would be good. My question is relating to budget paper 3, page 100, the police response. We have got the crime rate up in 2015 by 8.1 per cent, weapons and explosives offences up 16.9, stalking, threatening and harassment behaviour up 9.4, drug use and possession up 16.9, just to name a few of them. You said in March 2016 that crime was likely to get worse before it gets better. How much worse is it likely to become and when do you see that we can see a change to this?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I think those statistics will continue to climb for a while because the nature of offending we are dealing with at the moment is the type of offending that impacts quite a lot on the crime statistics — so high-volume offences. Where we are getting rises at the moment that concern us are around obviously car theft and offences that drive and are centred around that car theft. Because 7 out of 10 cars are now stolen with car keys — it is a lot harder to steal cars now than to break in and hot wire them like in the old days; now they need the key — we are seeing aggravated burglaries associated with car theft and we are seeing carjackings associated with car theft. A young person might break into a home with the intent of stealing a car, but in crime stats terms there is a car theft, an aggravated burglary, possibly an assault and then there might be crimes committed once the car is stolen, so statistically it impacts very heavily on crime statistics. They are some of the crimes that are increasing at the moment. Statistically I think you will find those numbers will climb for a bit longer.

We are doing a whole range of operations around exactly those issues at the moment. Major task forces are up and running. We are arresting people every day — in fact the number of arrests is quite large — so we are actually doing a lot of enforcement activity. But the nature of that offending — and I see those stats on a fortnightly basis in my office, so I see what has been assessed and validated by the crime stats agency — just on the raw numbers I see, I see those numbers continuing to be a problem for us until we really get some impact around the enforcement work we are doing and following up — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I know it is hard to predict, but months, years?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Months rather than years, although I should point out that in crime stats terms we have had about a six-year growth pattern we are trying to turn around. That has been due to a range of reasons. We have had family violence increasing — the reporting of family violence — so we have been getting

an understanding of that. We have been doing a lot more drug enforcement work. I have been trying to make sure that we have had a real enforcement approach to crime so that we have made more arrests in the last 12 months than we have ever made before; so we have been doing an enormous amount of enforcement work to try to do with this type of offending. And we have been trying to focus on the victim rate. At the moment, even though we are on a six-year statistical high on crime, the actual victim rate is quite low at the moment, and it is probably the lowest in 10 years. That is really important for us as well, because for us, when we look at the crime stats, we do not see the crime stats as the measure of harm in the community, because a lot of it depends on how much enforcement work we do. It is just important we understand it so that we can make sure we have as few victims of crime as possible and, when we have a victim of crime, that we can get more support around them as well as dealing with the offenders.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So are you satisfied, given what the minister has outlined in this budget — the 300 extra front-line police, that that is going to be enough to do the job?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We have asked for that number in relation to the public safety package, so there is extra police there for the front line. What I asked for in that package was to make sure that we did not just have police with the blue shirts but that we had the equipment, the technology and what sits behind that so that we can actually make sure that they would be as effective as possible. That is why the IT was so important to us at Victoria Police, so we could move them into that modern age. We thought that was really important. We are doing some work now around the family violence bit, so we are doing some work on what is required for us to meet the family violence royal commission. That will be subject to another discussion later on with government, I suppose. And then there is the work around our capability plan looking at the future years about what is required there. The work we are doing around mapping the deployment of this 300 will be critical to our understanding of what that future environment is for us, because with a new model around deployment we will have, I hope, a much better understanding of what those front-line demands are going to be in the next few years.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — You would be, I am sure, aware of the police association comment that you can get a pizza faster than you can get a police officer. What is your response to that; do you agree with that?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, I am not sure where Ron gets his pizzas from, but I have talked to him about it. I think the most important thing for me is that they are getting a quality response when the police are there. This is where this response time issue comes up from time to time. If we have to measure how many minutes it takes for a police officer to get there, we are going to get some really bad outcomes, because, for example, a van might be at a family violence incident for 5 or 6 hours. If they think, 'Right, now I have to cut you loose, I have to go here', we can get some really bad public safety outcomes out of that, so we absolutely — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — It is obviously very important, though, that if someone has a hot burg or something going on they can get someone as quickly as possible.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, absolutely, and that is what I said to Ron. I agree with the general premise that we want to get people there as quickly as possible, but Ron understands as well that having the right people to get there as quickly as possible is absolutely important. It is about the quality of the service as well; that is really important.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Minister, welcome. BP3, page 100, the public safety police response. The police association has stated that at least 500 extra front-line police are urgently needed over the next year alone to be deployed to desperately under-resourced stations to fix holes in rosters. We have got a population growth of 1.7 per cent per annum, so an extra 100 000 Victorians every year, and we have got an 8.1 per cent rise in the crime rate over the last year. So isn't this mega budget commitment of only 300 extra frontline police over the next two and half years just a drop in the ocean that simply fails to properly resource Victoria Police and appropriately respond to the many challenges facing our hardworking frontline policemen and women?

**Mr SCOTT** — Okay, I will touch on a couple of things. The simple answer is that this is a very significant investment in police. You raised population. I think there are a couple of important points to make. Firstly, members may be aware that since the year 2001 the Victorian population has risen by 26.5 per cent. The number of sworn police officers increased by 40.5 per cent during that period. It is important also to note, and I checked again after having this information given to me through budgets and budget updates, that every one of



those police officers — sworn police officers, that is — was funded by Labor governments. The most that the now opposition did was to play a little bit with the timing of one announcement.

It is important to understand that the definition of the front line that you are giving is one that frankly I reject. There are 300 individuals who are deployed to the front line, but if you are talking about teams that are working to tackle gang-related crime, if you are talking about the special operations group, if you are talking about police operating in family violence teams, they are on the front line. So we fundamentally have a different understanding of what the nature of the front line is, and I think the evidence strongly supports the position on the resource allocation that the police command asked us for and we were happy to give. It is also about freeing up resources to put police into more productive roles, so there was an investment in the previous budget of 400 police custody officers. That will free up police for more effective duties to protect the community, and that has been brought forward by six months.

There are also the technology upgrades I mentioned. So it is not just the number of police, it is actually how effectively police can undertake their task. As was mentioned, a study from the New Zealand experience was that they freed up around 30 minutes per shift, which equates to around 500 additional police per annum. These two investments of the custody officers and the technology investment are equivalent to something around 900 additional police available to fight crime in our community.

There have also been targeted investments to where there needs to be the most attention and where the police felt they needed resources. In terms of — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — Minister, we are running short of time, but the simple fact — —

**Mr SCOTT** — I had not finished. You had asked me a question that had multiple parts. I think it is important to understand that this is a different approach to that which has been taken previously, and I note the comments that were made by former commissioner Ken Lay, who talked about politicians being tough on crime but that we need to change the debate to get smart on crime. He was talking about the last election — that was 2010 — which turned into a Dutch auction on police numbers, but not once did anyone come to police command and ask what was best for the organisation. So it literally had a room full of faxes, antiquated systems, unable to meet the needs of modern policing, and yet it is important that we get the investments, which this budget does, to give police the actual equipment needed in order to conduct policing most effectively.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Do you reject the assertion of the police association — —

**Mr SCOTT** — I think this is a budget which makes a very significant investment. I — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Dr Carling-Jenkins until 2.45 p.m.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Welcome, Minister, Secretary and Chief Commissioner to the hearing today. Particularly tough on a Friday afternoon.

**Mr SCOTT** — For all of us.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — For everybody, yes.

**Ms SHING** — No!

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Except for Ms Shing, apparently. I would like to talk a little bit about triaging of family violence calls. So this is in reference to budget paper 3 from page 8. There is a whole-of-government focus on family violence. I commend that focus, and I know that that has quite a lot of interaction then with your portfolio, Minister. I note that in budget paper 3, page 267, there is an anticipation there will be a marked increase in the level of family violence crimes being reported. That is a positive thing — I understand that — because there will be more awareness so people will be reporting their crimes and feeling more comfortable to do so. What concerns me here is the practice of the triage of family violence calls. I have had some police officers, for example, telling me that in the stations they work in they are only able to answer one-in-three family violence calls. With the anticipation of the increased reporting of crime, I wonder if you could talk to that point about the triaging process, with particular reference to the mental health support for police as possibly a force to ignore or triage even more finely the calls.

**Mr SCOTT** — The first part of the question goes really to an operational matter, so I might refer that to the police commissioner, and I am happy to respond to the second half, which is actually a very important question as well.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — No problem. Thank you, Minister.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Thank you. In relation to family violence, in relation to how we triage those, it is really important that we do not try and discriminate at the point of call, and so we have to get to everyone as quickly as we can, because we often do not know what we are dealing with.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Of course.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — So it is a little bit trickier than some calls where you can really — triage often matters. If there has been a burglary, for example, that may have happened a couple of days ago, it's the family violence incidents that need immediate attendance, so we try and get the police there as fast as we can. The important thing when we get there is that we have the right tools to be able to provide a safe place for a victim and the family of that victim — often children — involved in the relationship, and they are able to get parties separated and create a safe place for the victim. The advent of the family violence safety notice was for us an important aspect of that, and that was around us trying to provide an immediate — that we identify a perpetrator, the perpetrator leaves and we provide that safety notice as a way to forcibly have them away from the premises.

That is one of the reasons that body-worn video is important to me, just because what we know from those processes is that we need to create an environment where victims undergo as least trauma as possible. The body-worn video enables us, when victims allow — and with body-worn video, in line with the royal commission recommendations, victims can opt out of being videoed —

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Of course.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — but where victims do want to do that, we have seen overseas the benefits that then come for the victim in providing modified behaviour from the offender at the scene — perpetrator at the scene — and then downstream an avoidance of then the victim having to come to court at all. So we can have a video and a police testimony, and then the victim does not need to have to come and confront a perpetrator at court a few days later.

We did recommend to the royal commission that we be able to implement intervention orders in the field, like they do in Tasmania, as we saw that as providing more certainty to victims at the scene, rather than them thinking, 'Now I've now got to go to court in a few days'. The feedback from our officers was that victims needed as much certainty as they could as quickly as possible. But unfortunately in the royal commission it was not an immediate recommendation but something that could be worked towards, so at the moment we are still working with the family violence safety notice operation. So to answer your question on the triaging, we do not tend to triage as much as to say, 'Well, we will attend this family violence matter before that one'. We just try to get everyone there as quickly as we can. I am not sure if that helps you or not.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Thank you. I can work with that; how is that?

**Mr SCOTT** — The issue of the mental health of the police force is a really serious issue and one that I know the Chief Commissioner takes very seriously, as does the government. There is provision in the budget for half a million dollars of output funding — that is one year, in 2016 — for a package of mental health and wellbeing initiatives to be delivered to all Victoria Police employees, including an online wellbeing suite. Now this will assist. The police have been undertaking work in this area. There is a review which has just been completed and received by police — and I might get the police commissioner to supplement on that — undertaken and led by clinical and organisational psychologist, Dr Peter Cotton, supported by Mr Peter Bull, a retired superintendent, and Nancy Hogan, a senior health care executive, in order to address exactly the issue that you have raised. Although there was not available to us the findings of that review, there has been an allocation of resources made by the government in order to ensure that there are resources available to respond to the needs that will arise out of that particular review. There is a large number of initiatives, but I will probably ask the Chief Commissioner to supplement on that very important issue.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — On the mental health issues, I certainly have for a long time regarded it as critical that we provide a better mental health framework in which police operate. I have certainly had friends as police officers that have committed suicide in my career, so have many other officers, and it is something that I am particularly passionate about. I did say on my first day in this role that it was one of the focus areas I wanted to give attention to early on, so I did ask Peter Cotton to do an independent review of how we are operating. He has given me that review now, and I think it will be about three weeks that we will be launching that publicly.

In essence, I asked him to look at what critical services we were providing, are they adequate, and are we doing enough in prevention? I also wanted him to look at past serving officers, because I see a lot of past serving officers struggling due to mental health issues that impacted on them when they were serving. Many police have left, thinking that would take care of their issues, but then the issues return, and they return in an unsupported environment. So it is important that we have something in the way of looking at that, so I have asked him to have a look at that as well.

The findings really, I think, will give us a good pathway to doing a whole range of good things to try and improve it. Without going into all the details — because that will be the subject of the discussion, I guess, when we launch it and we talk about what we are going to do about it — at the moment I am working through those recommendations. I am sharing them I think next week with the government to talk about what they have told us, and I am also working with the police association and the CPSU — because this relates to all of our employees, not just our sworn police — to work through what these recommendations are telling us for their future. But I am absolutely committed to the recommendations and committed to implementing them. Some of them may take a bit of time, but we will absolutely be committed to making sure we provide the best possible environment for the mental health of our staff, because policing is one of the areas statistically that is at high risk, as our other emergency services workers are, in relation to PTSD, general mental health issues and also, at the serious end of that, the suicides that are associated with poor mental health.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Thank you very much, Chief Commissioner, and thank you for mentioning that review, Minister, because one of my questions was around that, and you have actually answered that one, so that is great.

**Mr SCOTT** — We are trying to be helpful.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Very helpful.

**Mr SCOTT** — Could I just supplement very quickly?

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Yes, sure.

**Mr SCOTT** — That there is also work being undertaken by WorkSafe Victoria. I mentioned it in a previous capacity, but it relates to this portfolio so I will mention it here. Work has been undertaken in relation to occupational health and safety in the public sector, and the mental health of particularly emergency service workers and others who are in high risk of mental injury within the public sector is a focus of activity currently. There is work that has been undertaken — I will be careful about what I say because there is another announcement as well — around the re-establishment of WorkHealth, also looking particularly at the role of mental health in the workplace and what can be done to support mental health in the workplace.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Thank you, Minister; I appreciate that. Very briefly in the time I have remaining I would like to now come to the issue of car theft, which the Chief Commissioner actually referenced in an answer to Mr O'Brien's broader question earlier. This is in relation to budget paper 3, page 266, where we see that property crimes unrelated to family violence are expected to significantly exceed their target limits. There is a note there advising that the result is largely driven by five or six-year upward trends in the theft of cars or theft from cars. I understand that figures released earlier this year said that there was an increase of about 20 per cent in the last five years. The *Herald Sun* also reported, earlier this week, around a 'car-theft crime wave sweeping Melbourne' that was 'putting added pressure on insurance premiums', and it noted it was down to:

Notorious Apex gang members and opportunists breaking into homes to steal vehicle keys —  
which —

have turned Victoria into the nation's car theft capital.

Now I understand that a task force was set up to address this in the south-east, and I wonder if we could just have some brief comments around the success of this task force and maybe a comment on the model of this task force and whether it is ready to be replicated across the state as a way of addressing this issue.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to car theft, those figures are broadly accurate and consistent with what I am seeing. It is not just restricted to — —

Apex is a term used for one of the gangs in the Dandenong area; one of the members of that gang comes from Apex Street. These crimes are not just being committed by members of that particular group but by a whole range of young people, primarily young people in our south-east, north and western suburbs who have been engaging in the car theft.

It is an issue across the country, not just in Victoria, I might add. Just today I was talking to the New Zealand commissioner, and he was just nodding his head as I was telling him about the car theft issues we are dealing with. So certainly the numbers, the actual raw numbers — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Ms Shing until 2.45 p.m.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Could I have the rest of that on notice, please?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. Sorry about that, I talk too much.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — No, that is okay. It is fine.

**Ms SHING** — If you wanted to finish your sentence, Chief Commissioner, that is fine.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chief Commissioner, for your comments in relation to police numbers and also for VPS and sworn efficiency improvements that can be undertaken to get more of the smart policing that former Chief Commissioner Lay had referred to in the comment and the quote that you gave, Minister. I would like to talk about police numbers in regional Victoria, if I may. I take you to budget paper 3, page 97, which refers to regional and rural police stations. As you would all no doubt be aware, and as many in the force and the VPS are aware, police stations and police in country towns play a really different role to that of people in the city. We see that there is often a much greater scope of duties and involvement as part of their core duties. Colac police station is in fact the largest police station investment in the budget. What upgrades are we looking at at that station? Also, can I ask you to give indicative information about how upgrades will assist in better policing, and also Cowes and Mallacoota police stations in Gippsland?

**Mr SCOTT** — I am happy to respond to that question. The Colac police station is a really good upgrade. There is an allocation of \$11.5 million for the replacement of the existing Colac police station. The replacement of the existing facility will resolve functional issues associated with offender management, which is a real issue at the station. This means that offenders can be held and processed in Colac rather than requiring transportation to Geelong police station, which I believe is 76 kilometres from Colac, enhancing police response capability for the local community. The current Colac police station is at capacity, with no provision for additional resources, specialist units or external agencies such as family violence partner agencies and victim support services. The new station will provide the capacity for adequate and secure facilities, alleviating issues and accommodating police resources.

In terms of Cowes and Mallacoota police stations, for Cowes police station there is an allocation of \$3 million to rebuild the Cowes police station. The new station will meet the growth in demand for services and address functionality issues. The rebuild of this station will provide the capacity to accommodate additional resources, specialist units or external agencies such as family violence partner agencies or victim support services. I would re-emphasise this is capability. Again, the exact deployments and resource allocations will be a decision for the Chief Commissioner in terms of all these stations.

The new station will mean that when an offender is arrested they can be held and processed at Cowes rather than requiring transportation to Wonthaggi police station, which is 40 kilometres from Cowes. This will enhance service delivery to the area, particularly during major events when the demand for a patrol unit and incidence of arrests increase. The Cowes police station was originally designed for 2 police members; there are currently 11 police personnel at the Cowes police station — —

**Ms SHING** — That is VPS and sworn?

**Mr SCOTT** — I can check exactly what personnel there may be. We do not have that information. If you wish, I can provide that information. We should be able to provide that on notice.

**Ms SHING** — Thanks, Minister.

**Mr SCOTT** — At Mallacoota the government has allocated \$3.3 million to rebuild the Mallacoota police station. Replacing this station will support, again, efficient offender processing. The new station will mean offenders can be detained and processed in Mallacoota rather than requiring transportation to Bairnsdale police station, which is 232 kilometres from Mallacoota.

**Ms SHING** — I have driven it a few times; I know just how far away it is.

**Mr SCOTT** — This will enhance police response capability for the Mallacoota community.

**Ms SHING** — Thank you. In relation to information on upgrading of police stations and the tyranny of distance, regional stations often experience the lag involved in resources being potentially at one end of an area when they need to respond to calls at the other end. How will technological changes, including the retiring of the current fax system, assist in such a way that better responsiveness and dispatch can occur?

**Mr SCOTT** — It is not just the fax system — I can go to that. There are also issues — —

**Ms SHING** — Digital radio as well, Minister.

**Mr SCOTT** — I will deal with both. One is really about, as I was describing, returning to base — that in a fax world, rather than having effective tablet technology, you have to return to base. I had in the slides the workflow of the current circumstances as compared to the workflow which will be undertaken once the technology upgrade is rolled out, particularly the tablet technology.

In relation to the country areas, there is also another significant issue, which is that currently there is an upgrade of digital radio being provided. I think this was the subject of a commitment in the last budget — that there be an upgrade to digital radios. Literally there were circumstances where police in regional Victoria had a legacy analog service, which is subject to serious security issues. There are persons with scanners and there are even mobile phone apps these days which can be used for this sort of purpose, so there is an issue about public interception. So not only will there be an improvement in the quality of the service but it will be given a security which it does not currently have.

The new digital system will include mobile, in-car, portable hand-held and fixed station radios on an encrypted digital network — and that encryption is absolutely critical — using the same technology as is used by police in metropolitan regions. Transition from the old analog unencrypted state mobile radio system network onto the new digital encrypted regional mobile radio network will occur from mid-2016 and will involve the rollout of radios and a phased transition to this new network. I might get the Chief Commissioner to supplement on the rollout.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Of the regional radios?

**Mr SCOTT** — Yes.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It is due for rollout in mid-2017. It is a project being led by emergency management, so it is not a police-led project, but we are part of the project team. The secretary's area has got the running of that project. But it is pretty important we can get that because the open nature of those country comms are something that every time I go into country Victoria gets raised with me. People on their apps know exactly where the police are going, who they are going to see. It is crazy stuff in this day and age. So we are really keen to get that done. Greg, I do not know whether you want to add anything.

**Mr WILSON** — We are currently negotiating with network providers, but we actually expect the rollout to be completed mid-2017.

**Ms SHING** — If I might also take you to another issue which is significant for regional Victoria, that is crystal methamphetamine — well, the issue of ice and the way in which regional communities are dealing with ice. It is one thing which many people on the record are saying we cannot arrest our way out of, but there are other innovative and proactive approaches to dealing with crime associated with ice use. I take you to BP3, page 97, and ask you, Minister and also perhaps Chief Commissioner, to talk about the regional forensic labs and the rationale for having those labs located in regional Victoria.

**Mr SCOTT** — I will provide some initial comments and might hand over to the Chief Commissioner. Currently all Victoria Police major forensic services operate out of a single facility in Macleod, with four accredited regional sites providing basic forensic services only. The majority of forensic evidence from around Victoria is being conveyed to Macleod to be analysed, and then there is a prolonged time frame because of that transport and conveyancing to arrive at Macleod, and then you have got of course the time taken in doing the analysis itself.

The time is really critical in providing police with significant intelligence and facilitating prosecutions and thwarting criminal activity. By having the forensic services in regional locations, this will significantly impact on the capacity and capability of regional police in combating the prevalence of drugs — particularly the drug ice, which is a major issue in regional Victoria — and serious crime and organised crime in regional communities. I might ask the Chief Commissioner to supplement my answer.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — In relation to the ice, we certainly continue to see that in rural communities this is continuing to be a big problem, and the anecdotal information is that it is continuing; it is not getting any better. In some areas they are saying they are seeing it sort of steady; others are getting worse. The application of the forensic expertise for us is about getting quicker results for the country police officers at the moment. We try to turn those around as quickly as we can, with just the tyranny of distance getting the evidence to the forensic police. The conversation between the forensic officer and the officers involved in the case is critical in getting the quick forensic results, knowing what to look for and in what order to look for it. Having that work done closer to the country areas we think will get a quicker turnaround to be able to deal with traffickers of ice. So it is really about trying to do that. It will probably be the larger country towns where these are based, but they will service the rural areas.

**Ms SHING** — Thank you. I might for the minute that we have remaining take you to page 268, the Victoria Police operating budget and the significant number of regional stations receiving custody officers. I just ask you to briefly explain what the reason for this is and also to advise how many custody officers have been deployed to Morwell, Inspector Dean Thomas's area, to date.

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of the deployment and the rationale, I can provide some information I have on Morwell. I think there are three officers to date. In terms of the rationale for the deployments regionally, that is something that is conducted by the Chief Commissioner, so I might — —

**Ms SHING** — Thank you, Minister.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Just at the stations where obviously we have our category A cells, we want to have PCOs there doing the custody environment, and that is where they are headed. So we have a number of those in country Victoria. You have just mentioned one of those. We have got PCOs at — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Mr Smith until 3.07 p.m.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Minister, if I return again to population growth and police numbers, do you accept that we are growing at 1.7 per cent per annum?

**Mr SCOTT** — Yes.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Police numbers in November 2014 were 13 151; in March 2016 they are 13 215. In order to have kept pace with population growth and have the same number per capita of police officers as it was in 2014, how many police officers should you have brought in over that period?

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of your analysis, there is a fundamental difference in the analysis because with police officers we look to the entire resourcing. So police custody officers, which we are introducing, also

impact on the ability of police to impact on the front line. And also we have a different view about the role of VPS staff in their capacity — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — I just asked for a very simple answer to a very simple question.

**Mr SCOTT** — But it is a different — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — You are reframing my question, with respect, Minister.

**Mr SCOTT** — Because your question makes a series of presumptions implicit in a range of statements that have been made by the opposition.

**Mr T. SMITH** — No, no, no. That is not — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Mr Smith!

**Mr T. SMITH** — The question has been put, and I am seeking an answer.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr SCOTT** — Well, I am happy to respond in terms of the population over time. In fact I am very happy to have a comparison of the investments in police both in sworn and in VPS staff over the period of the most recent history, in fact the last 15 years, in Victoria. The investments in police that we have made, both in sworn and unsworn staff, come in a period when during the former government there in fact were not investments. There was a slight tinkering with the time line. The investments were all made by the former Labor government. So the additional police who were made by the former Liberal government — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — I was not here, but I am pretty sure the last government brought in 1700 extra police.

**Mr SCOTT** — I am very glad to respond to that interjection because it was actually the 10–11 budget of the last Labor government that introduced those police officers. In fact there were no additional police — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Order! The minister is answering the question.

**Mr SCOTT** — I can go to exactly that issue — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — No, no, no. I am still — —

**Mr SCOTT** — You interjected and asked me, and I am responding to your further interjection and question, in fact. The investment was made in the 2010–11 budget. In the 2011–12 budget there was an attempt to reappropriate that investment by — —

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of the investment, the investment was actually made by the former Labor government in the 2010–11 budget — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That is just not right, Minister.

**Mr SCOTT** — which is actually correct. I know there are a number of members of the committee — —

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr SCOTT** — In fact I would say that one of the important things — and I touched upon it — is that we need to look beyond, and I made the reference to the statements that were made by the former Chief Commissioner in terms of looking to a more holistic view about what the ability is for police to respond. What we are doing is giving police the actual tools required to respond. So in terms of police numbers, for example in 16–17 — and I might check with the Chief Commissioner — I think it is about 240-odd who are planned for recruitment on the information that I was given from the investment in training, which is more than population from that very narrow — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — You think 240-odd. These are pretty important numbers. It is protecting the community.

**Mr SCOTT** — I can get an exact figure, but it will depend on the processing through the police academy, which is undertaken by the police. Of the investment of 406, if you cut it just on sworn officers for 16–17, it is more than police, but when you factor in issues such as the ability of police to undertake their task by having the technology they require, which is something that the former government took no action on — it literally left a room full of faxes as an appropriate mechanism — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — If we really want to start attributing blame, who has been in government for 12 of the last 16 years in this state, Minister?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Smith, the minister is answering your question.

**Ms WARD** — Mr Smith, I really need to give you some Fisherman's Friend lozenges. Your throat must be sore after all this shouting.

**The CHAIR** — Order! The minister is answering Mr Smith's question.

**Mr SCOTT** — I will not take the bait on the interjections, but if you look at the interventions that we have made, we have invested in the first two budgets for 1156 police personnel. Let us be fair and try to be reasonable. There is a difference of view between the opposition and the government around how you constitute what is an effective utilisation of police resources based on the definition that you use — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — Yes, you are right about that. We think that police numbers should grow with population growth, which should have been at least 298 over the last 16 months, to help you out there.

**Mr SCOTT** — But we have invested in the last two budgets for 1156 police personnel. Those have been targeted in response to the needs of the community. Further, we have made the really significant investment in the equipment and technology that is required to ensure that police have the tools they need in order to perform their duties. In terms of the definitional issues, in terms of the policing that is required, it is important to understand that, having task force-based policing — and again we are very happy in this budget that we are able to support the police's request in relation to task force policing — we support task forces such as the anti-gang task force, such as the public order response team and such as the specialist operation group providing the — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — But, Minister, this is just bureaucratic jargon. What the public want is police on the street, and you have only increased it by 64 since you came to office.

**Mr SCOTT** — Could I be really kind and say with all due respect — and we appear to be using the upper house convention and 'Mr Smith', but I am happy to say 'the member for Kew' — believing that providing specialist police personnel to operate a 24/7 police monitoring assessment centre for the special operations group, for the public order response team and for new officers to support personnel for anti-gang or illicit trafficking teams, to characterise that as bureaucratic jargon I think is unworthy of the duties that are performed by those individuals in the community. It is unworthy in 2016 of a modern analysis of what is required in order to protect the community from the threat of crime in our society. I would respectfully also contend, Mr Smith or member for Kew, whichever you prefer — I am quite happy to be polite in these circumstances — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — I know who you are talking to.

**Mr SCOTT** — Through the Chair of course — I should be doing it through the Chair — giving police the technology, particularly in terms of the technology which will both provide better evidentiary support, modify offender behaviour and help protect victims of family violence, in giving police the support and equipment that they require in order to ensure that less time is spent travelling back to police stations in order to write up a report, fax that off and then have that transcribed and then the information is delayed, having that sort of investment is not some sort of bureaucratic exercise. It has a real, positive impact on the ability of Victoria Police to undertake the duties that they perform. I am sure all members of this committee respect the work of Victoria Police and would wish that they have the effective resources required in order to undertake their duties.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Please do not infer that I was not.

**Mr SCOTT** — I did not.



**Mr T. SMITH** — I simply was making the point, Minister, that you have only increased full-time police by 63 since you came to office.

**Mr SCOTT** — We have made an investment in the first two budgets of 1156 police personnel, and we also respect the work of — and it was alluded to earlier — the specialist VPS staff who perform effective duties. It is 2016, so fingerprint and forensic experts, persons who are psychological experts working in some of the most difficult areas of offending — and I will probably refrain from going into detail of the work in relation to terrorism that is undertaken by VPS staff — but these are people who are absolutely on the front line and who are absolutely ensuring that the Victorian community is safe and are doing their duty on behalf of the Victorian community. They may not fit the definition that the opposition wishes to characterise, but I think it is really important to understand — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Minister, I think we have had enough. Thank you.

**Ms SHING** — You have had enough?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, we have had about 3 or 4 minutes of the question.

**Ms SHING** — Of that answer.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Of the answer.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Minister, I refer you to BP3, page 100. Despite the clear and unequivocal promise of the police minister last year that no existing police stations will close under your government's watch, several police stations have closed, never opened to the public or had their opening hours to the community slashed. Given your budget commitment to 300 extra frontline police will be only a drop in the ocean of what is actually required, will you guarantee that those police stations that have been closed, never opened or had their hours cut since November 2014, including at Nunawading, Burwood, Minyip, Eildon, Lara, Somerville, Carrum Downs and Ashburton, will be appropriately resourced and reopened, opened or have their hours restored?

**Mr SCOTT** — I will reference part of this question to the police commissioner because opening hours or allocation of individual police is the responsibility of Victoria Police command, particularly the police Chief Commissioner. The commissioner recently said Victoria Police is not closing police stations but had adjusted counter hours at some stations to put more police out on the road, and policing minutes save lives. In the few seconds — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — What is the definition of an open police station?

**Mr SCOTT** — The statement has been made by the Chief Commissioner, and I might refer — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Ms Pennicuik until 3.18 p.m.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Good afternoon again, Minister, and to you, Mr Wilson, and the Chief Commissioner and to other police and departmental staff who have come to be with us here this afternoon. Can I start by saying thank you for your presentation. It was very interesting, and I think it points to complexities that are involved in policing. It just is, as I say, very interesting to see the new initiatives and the new directions et cetera. I have seen that, I think, over the other times I have previously been on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. If we go back six years, there was a leap ahead with different ways of looking at things. Now there is another one. Can I also just begin by saying, I was very interested to hear the Chief Commissioner speaking in response to Dr Carling-Jenkins's questions about the imminent release of the Cotton review and the money in the budget there for police mental health initiatives. The minister would be aware, and you probably are yourself, Chief Commissioner, that I have been furnishing the minister with a lot of questions about this particular issue via questions on notice. So I am very happy to hear about that.

But if I could just turn to family violence, in the presentation and also on page 100 of budget paper 3 is the reference to police numbers in terms of 300 so-called frontline police, 106 specialist officers and 52 specialist and support personnel. We have touched a little bit on that already this afternoon. What I am interested in, because I heard the minister go through saying the anti-gang and illicit trafficking, 30 people; 40 in the public order response team; 20 in the SOG; and I think 26 I heard in the monitoring and assessment centre, which comes to 116 not 106.

**Mr SCOTT** — Sorry, there are police personnel everywhere. I can clarify that if you wish.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — But the nub of the question, Minister, is: are they going to be any specialist staff, be they police or VPS staff, in the family violence units in Victoria Police? For certainly it has been raised by the police association that the family violence units do not necessarily have specially trained family violence police or specialist staff in them, and some of them are not well enough resourced et cetera. So I think this is a very important issue for us to get to a little more detail on, if we could.

**Mr SCOTT** — I might give some response and then also get some augmentation from the Chief Commissioner. Of the 300 generalist duty police, the sort of figure I have is 15 per cent of crime and 40 per cent of police time is spent on family violence matters. So those individuals will very definitely be involved in dealing with family violence issues. This is not the only response that will take place, and the police commissioner alluded to this in an earlier answer in terms of family violence.

I would say in terms of family violence that one of the investments is in the body-worn cameras, which responds to one of the recommendations of the family violence royal commission. The government has indicated that there will be an announcement of a 10-year plan in response to the royal commission recommendations, and that will include matters and there are issues of course of funding associated with that. That will include areas in the policing portfolio as well. So the response in terms of the 300 generalist duties police forces would definitely be related in their duties to family violence, but there is further work that will be undertaken, and we have in part responded to some of the recommendations, particularly those in relation to body-worn cameras in this budget. I will get a supplementation from the police commissioner.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, certainly. That frontline rostered 300, certainly their everyday work includes attending family violence incidents. We certainly are doing the work at the moment about what specialist resources are needed to meet the recommendations of the royal commission. That includes augmenting the 32 specialist family violence units with additional specialist investigators, which are in those recommendations, and what will be VPS specialists — psychologists and people with expertise in the social service space — to be part of those teams as well. So we are still doing that work to inform government what the requirements are going to be there, but we certainly see that as separate to the public safety package of 300. In terms of the specialist resources, that is something we will be engaging with government about.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you for that answer. Perhaps I could just follow up with asking: could you supply me with a little bit more detail about what the role of the specialist family violence units are, as opposed to what the minister has been saying and you have just said? I understand all police have to respond or can be called upon and they will have the new equipment, but what is the role of those units in terms of that integration?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — They have a whole range of roles. They certainly support the police officers who are going to those incidents by way of providing them with best practice information, best practice training on what is required in terms of a more qualitative response when they are there. They also deal every day with what we call recidivist offenders and repeat victims. A lot of our real harm is driven by people who are repeated offenders, so we need a more specialised response so it is not just a matter of the police turning up and issuing notices and clearing the space and going. They actually go and work with those offenders and try and make sure they absolutely know what is required of them, make sure they get the right messages about the sort of behaviours that are expected. They work with a psychologist as well who participates with them. Court orders around treatment programs — they are part of coordinating and participating with that.

In relation to repeat victims, it is very much about trying to provide a supporting environment for those victims so they feel more supported and they are not continuing to be victimised by the poor behaviours that they are subjected to. So it is a matter of working with that recidivist cohort, repeat victim cohort, and providing best practice training to our members, so when the members come back to the station and they have had a particular tricky case, they can go in there, tell them about the case and say, ‘Did I handle that right? Did I handle that wrong?’, and just try and make sure they get better at it, I guess.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you again for that answer. How do you respond — the minister or the Chief Commissioner — to the comments by the police association that there needed to be more boots on the ground, is what they said, to fill the family violence units across the state?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Well, the police association said in my conversations with them they were concerned about whether those 300 officers on the rosters would be taken from rostered duties and put into the family violence units. So I made it clear that to me that was a separate piece of planning about the family violence response to the royal commission and I was certainly committed to trying make sure that those 300 were on rosters, being visible. And I think that was what that comment related to.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you for that information. I am sure we will all be keeping an eye on it. If I could just turn to another issue, which is with regard to the community crime prevention program. At page 97 of budget paper 3 the minister says that in this output initiative there will be \$9.8 million in the next financial year and 9.6 in the following for the crime prevention program to build crime prevention capability, to assist communities experiencing high crime and disadvantage and to address emerging crime trends. I ask if you could provide a little bit of detail about that, but also: why is there no ongoing funding past those two years?

**Mr SCOTT** — Okay. I will deal with the last part first, because it will stick in my mind, and then I will go to the detail of it rather than vice versa. There have been significant changes in this space, particularly in this budget, where there is an expansion, and it has been decided that it would be responsible to review the new improved grant program in two years. So it should not be seen that there is no commitment to crime prevention. It is a fairly normal process when you have undergone a change in the sort of structure of a program to look at reviewing it in a couple of years. That is the basis of that. I think we have a little bit of time left, so I will try to be reasonably to the point, rather than roundabout.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — We have a minute and a half.

**Mr SCOTT** — There are a number of elements. There are the place-based and targeted grants, which over the two years is \$10.647 million. These are grants for looking at the underlying causes of crime and addressing new and emerging crime trends. There is a Communities that Care program. This program supports communities to identify and address causal factors leading to offending and antisocial behaviours in young people, and that is — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Sorry, I do not mean to interrupt, but I have read that. I want just a bit more detail: where are they, how is it decided where they go et cetera?

**Mr SCOTT** — These are grant programs, so it is open — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — What are the criteria?

**Mr SCOTT** — The guidelines have not been finalised yet, but they will fit within the criteria. Rather than going through a circular discussion about that, they have not been finalised, and when they are they will be made publicly available. So I cannot provide that information; that is still being developed currently.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And when do you expect that might be? I mean, in terms of discussion about being smarter on crime, I think one of the smarter things to do is to try to prevent crime. Do you know when they may be due, Minister?

**Mr SCOTT** — I will just check. Months is what I would expect.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Hi, Minister and officers. I just want to ask you about the community crime prevention program — budget paper 3, page 97 — and also your presentation, where you talk about 19.4 million over two years to renew the program. I just want to see if you could elaborate a bit further on what it entails. In particular, you say it is enhanced. How is it enhanced?

**Mr SCOTT** — As was said — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Just answering my question — the same question.

**Mr SCOTT** — In detail.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — That is right. I was going to say, ‘Picking up from Ms Pennicuik’, but you stopped him.

**Mr SCOTT** — We will deal with each of them. There are a number of elements. But in terms of the place-based and targeted grant programs, these are really to be used in part — there will be others, but this is the main focus of it, so these are reasonably flexible programs actually — to empower disadvantaged communities to target the underlying causes of crime and address new and emerging crime trends. There is a well-established link between crime and disadvantage, and by targeting our investments and programs to initiatives in those areas that need it, we can work with those communities and help reduce key risk factors for offending and increase protective factors for vulnerable groups such as young people.

There is also funding for the Communities that Care program. This is a program supporting addressing causal factors leading to offending and antisocial behaviour, particularly in young people. This is assisting communities to organise and enhance their understanding of local needs and providing them with evidence-based options to address those needs. We currently have sites at Warrnambool, Corio-Norlane, Cardinia, East Gippsland and Bendigo, and this budget provides funding for a further three sites that will be determined in the near future. We are also providing an extra \$100 000 to each of the existing sites to support new evidence-based programs to tackle the underlying causes of crime.

The budget also recommits to the accessible public safety infrastructure and community safety fund grant program. Under the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund councils can apply for grants of up to \$250 000 to implement urban design initiatives and technologies that prevent crime in their local area. Typically this may include issues such as lighting or CCTV cameras. I know there are a number of areas where CCTV can play a particularly important role, particularly in getting the identities of offenders.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Minister, I was just going to ask you, in relation to the review undertaken by Ben Carroll, the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, and some of the recommendations for the program, will this recast program take the recommendations of that review into account?

**Mr SCOTT** — Absolutely. I would like to commend the member for Niddrie, Ben Carroll, for the work that he has undertaken in this particular area. He is the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, of course, and he found that the program was evidence based, effective in leveraging investment and building community engagement, strongly supported by the community, and managed efficiently by the community crime prevention unit. He did find, however, that our crime prevention response needed to be further targeted to areas of disadvantage and crime hotspots, and that is a particularly useful insight. This is an early finding in Mr Carroll's report and directly influenced the introduction of a new place-based and targeted grants program. We have also expanded and further targeted that program following the release of Mr Carroll's report.

I think it worth putting on the record the nature of the investment. In 2015–16 the budget was \$5.8 million. That has increased in this budget to \$9.8 million in 2016–17 and \$9.6 million in 2017–18. Not only is this a better targeting of the program, but it is also an increase in the scale of the community crime prevention program. That expansion was really importantly influenced by the work of the parliamentary secretary, who found that there was strong support for the expansion of the Communities that Care program in particular, and that is why we have provided funding in this budget to expand the program from five to eight locations.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Thank you, Minister. You talked about the councils as one applicant for CCTV or how you design an urban environment to mitigate crime. Are there any other innovative examples in terms of the causes? So this tries to address the causes of crime from a community perspective. Are there any other examples that are innovative in terms of where this money would go?

**Mr SCOTT** — Sorry, for which program was it?

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — For the package.

**Mr SCOTT** — The package, okay, so — —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — So could you describe one element of it?

**Mr SCOTT** — Okay. I am happy to provide an example. This is the Place-based Targeted Grants program, which was in the 2015–16 budget. There was an investment made of \$200 000 in Berry Street Victoria Inc., and that relates to young Koori people in the Latrobe Valley, which I am sure some members here would be familiar with. The program itself can provide up to — well, that is the previous program — \$200 000 to support locally

based partnership projects that reduce the risk of crime and increase community safety in nominated areas experiencing high rates of crime and disadvantage.

So the \$200 000 to Berry Street Victoria Inc. was for the development of a program that identified 30 young Koori people in the Latrobe Valley who were at risk of regular contact with the criminal justice system — and, of course, I am sure all members here are familiar with the particular issues facing our Indigenous communities in relation to the criminal justice system — and helped them reconnect with their communities, strengthen their cultural identity and develop their education and training. That was done through a series of workshops and personal development sessions, with the ultimate purpose of preventing crime in that area.

There has been a provision of \$149 000 for a similar program in Doveton. That is run by Jesuit Social Services and targets 40 at-risk young people with Pacific Islander and Maori backgrounds. This is another quite disadvantaged group in our society who are over-represented in the criminal justice system. These grants were very well received and we have expanded the program to over \$10 million for two years and further targeted it to address specific issue areas and address emerging crime trends as expressed by the Crime Statistics Agency.

As I was enunciating to Sue, we are currently formatting guidelines for this program. Now, we are expecting this to be announced within months, certainly in this year — calendar year rather than financial year — and we would be keen to get organisations and groups in the community who have got innovative ways. This is really to ensure that we have a focus on the causes of crime and what can be done most effectively to address crime in the community and that our prevention efforts have an impact on those who are significantly disadvantaged. It is going to be one of the key focuses to ensure there is an effect on the community.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Minister, thank you, that was very comprehensive. I missed the bit about the statistics or some crime agency that there was a reference to. I was going to ask you a couple more quick questions. One is: how do we measure success with these grants programs? Did you allude to that a moment ago? I may have missed it.

**Mr SCOTT** — I did not. Ultimately there is obviously an evaluation, and it is very important that there is an evaluation process attached to grants and it is important that there is an empirical basis. That was really at the heart of the review that was undertaken by the parliamentary secretary —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — By Mr Carroll.

**Mr SCOTT** — to ensure that there was an empirical basis for why grant funding was being sought. Ultimately community crime prevention programs should be measured on a macro level in the success they have in reducing crime. But particularly for those areas where they are targeted at the most disadvantaged members of the community, we want to look at a response where there is a lessening of offences amongst those who are targeted, because in our society there are some groups — and it is no secret that particularly in our Indigenous communities there is an over-representation of individuals in offending. So programs that are targeted to reach those individuals who are at greatest risk is something the government strongly supports.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Thank you, Minister. Just a couple of quick ones to finish off, and this one perhaps to the Chief Commissioner. Obviously these programs work together in the context of what police already do — maybe an extension to an extent to some of the multicultural liaison officers and those early successes that VicPol had with a more community approach to policing. How do you view these programs?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We have certainly capitalised a lot since those days. We have a strong engagement in relation to the multicultural advisory groups that we have supporting us. So we have advisory groups that come in and do that. A lot of that helps us to design the prevention work that we do, Victoria Police. We sort of keep an eye on the crime prevention initiatives and then try to work with those as well. Step Back Think is a good information prevention initiative about the one punch and having a think about the violent behaviour. So that sort of stuff helps us as well.

But in terms of the multicultural reach we try to be informed as much as possible by those multicultural advisory groups that we have advising us and then work those into our engagement model around prevention. It is certainly one of the key areas — prevention — in new and emerging communities that we regard as vulnerable communities in there as well.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Thank you very much, Minister, and Chief Commissioner.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — The reference is BP3, page 100, again. Minister, police minister Noonan stated last year that the government would not support the closure or downgrading of any police station. Given the stations that Mr Smith outlined earlier that have closed, never opened or had their hours cut, will you give the same commitment for the rest of the government's term?

**Mr SCOTT** — Thank you. I think that there is a definitional issue. Because it relates to operational matters, I will refer the answering part to the Chief Commissioner.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — No, Minister, I am asking from a government perspective. This is a policy question, and it is a resourcing issue.

**Mr SCOTT** — I think again perhaps there is a difference of view between the advice being provided to the government and the opposition's view. The Chief Commissioner recently said Victoria Police is not closing police stations but had adjusted counter hours at some stations to put more police out on the road in a context where policing minutes save lives.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Okay, but I am basing my question on what Mr Noonan said. He made that commitment.

**Mr SCOTT** — There is a difference of view, with all due respect, between the advice that has been provided to government, which we take, and the views of the opposition. I might get the Chief Commissioner to supplement in terms of police counter hours.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — With respect, Minister, I am not asking the Chief Commissioner. This is very much a political question, and it is about whether you will commit to no further closures or downgrades of police stations for the remainder of the term, as your predecessor did and then broke that commitment.

**The CHAIR** — I think — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — It is not something I can ask the Chief Commissioner to give.

**The CHAIR** — I think, Mr O'Brien, what the minister is referring to is the fact that although it is not within the minister's gift to determine whether a station is open or shut, it is — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Why could Mr Noonan do it then?

**The CHAIR** — Well, you would have to ask Mr Noonan that. I am just merely — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, he is not here.

**The CHAIR** — I am merely responding to what the minister is saying. There is an operational issue that is before force command that will determine whether a station would open or close. That would be my understanding in terms of — —

**Mr SCOTT** — I have indicated that the advice provided to government by the Chief Commissioner stated that Victoria Police is not closing police stations but adjusted counter hours at some stations to put more police out on the road. There may be a definitional issue and a difference between what the views of the opposition are and what the advice received by Victoria Police — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — And presumably the minister.

**Mr SCOTT** — I accept the advice provided by the Chief Commissioner, as it is an operational matter. In terms of counter hours, I — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — It is the government, not the Chief Commissioner. I am asking the government.

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of counter hours, I think it is worth — and it is an important issue — enunciating that the government supports the Chief Commissioner's role in making determinations about the allocation of police resources in order to ensure the most effective utilisation of resources to protect the community. That is

the principal position which I, as the acting minister, support but is also one that sits within the legislative framework in relation to the Police Act and the divisions of the responsibilities. So there is advice provided that government has that the police's own view is that they are not closing police stations but have adjusted counter hours in order to put more police out on the road. Now if the opposition takes a different view — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Minister, I have not got the commitment from you; that is understandable. With the greatest respect — and I am not meaning any disrespect to the Chief Commissioner; it is not his bailiwick — I am asking for the political issue. But I will move on, because very, very directly related is the commitment given by the member for Bellarine in 2014:

The shadow Minister for Police and I ... are committed to maintaining all four stations if elected in November, with Queenscliff, Drysdale and Portarlington operational 16 hours ...

Given that Queenscliff is only open four days per week and Drysdale and Portarlington, if open, only open one shift per day, Minister, when will that commitment be delivered?

**Mr SCOTT** — The Chief Commissioner is responsible for the allocation of resources.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, why have we got candidates — members of Parliament and ministers — making these commitments when it is not actually in their bailiwick to do so? You make a political commitment before an election and then when you get into government, 'No, that's all the Chief Commissioner. I can't answer that'.

**Mr SCOTT** — I am responding to the question in the context of there being a Police Act which was introduced by the former government, which relates to — and I can check the operational date of the Act, and I can check some detail about when commitments were made and when the Act came into operation — but there is a Police Act which provides for the responsibility of the allocation of resources to be for the Chief Commissioner, and that is the context in which I perform my duties.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Okay. I am not in any attempt trying to drag the Chief Commissioner into a political argument, but given your advice, Chief Commissioner, in the *Geelong Advertiser*, Sergeant Birch at Geelong police stated that in his 29 years of policing he 'had never seen police busier or more stressed than in 2016', and he goes on to say that the workload 'had more than doubled' in the past 12 months.

**The CHAIR** — What date was this article, Mr O'Brien?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry?

**The CHAIR** — What date was the article? I note you have referred to it as the *Geelong Advertiser*. Do you have a date for the article?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — No, I do not — I do. I can provide the article if you like.

**The CHAIR** — It is recent, okay.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Will the police force be providing any additional resources and numbers to the Geelong area?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, Geelong will factor no doubt in the work we are doing on this current resource allocation. Certainly it is a busy area. Daryl Clifton, the superintendent down there, was also in the paper recently, talking about his experience. He is about to retire, and he was giving, I think, an interview about his career.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Some fairly strong words, yes.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. Colin is in there as well — talking about what they are seeing. They are seeing, whilst we have, especially in relation to youth, the overall numbers of youth committing crime is actually diminishing as a cohort, Geelong is one of those places where they are seeing an increase in youth crime with young people getting involved in crime. So it is an area that is absolutely going to figure in that resource allocation for sure.

It is a growth area in the outskirts of Geelong too, so certainly in that — and you would properly see it as well as I do — but the housing growth heading out to the west, out through Waurin Ponds and out now well past Waurin Ponds and then down the infield as you head down to the Surf Coast has created challenges for Geelong. That is why when I came in I had a look at the Bellarine issue. I agreed to put additional numbers down there because I thought it might help with Geelong's workload. They are the ones that are the first port to that area in that infield growth. That was really behind my thinking in that area. But to pick up your point, I absolutely agree. It is an area where police are really busy — the west, inner west and heading down in through Geelong is our busiest area when we look at the actual numbers of crime that police are responding to.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — For the record, Minister, the Police Act came in in 2013.

**Mr SCOTT** — That is when it was introduced.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Ms Neville's comments were from 2014, and last year it was Minister Noonan's comments, but I will hand over to Mr Smith.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Again, BP3, page 100, and I would like to know why you cut \$300 000 from the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council, despite, from what I can gather, strong industry opposition and indeed high-level representations by the police to the contrary.

**Mr SCOTT** — Just for clarification, the decision certainly predates — I think there is a timing issue. If you are meaning 'you' as a collective of the government, I am quite happy to set the question on that basis.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Say again?

**Mr SCOTT** — The decision in relation to funding the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council certainly predates my time as minister, but I am happy to answer the question.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Yes, to be fair it would. I am sure you have got — —

**Mr SCOTT** — The government had made a decision in terms of the council based on advice from the department in terms of the effectiveness of the program. The analysis of the council's forward work plan indicated that Victorian funding would be cross-subsidising one-off activities in other states that would have no benefit for Victorians. The council also had a record which was chequered, if I am being kind, of completing projects, with nearly 60 per cent of activities in the council's work plan either delayed, deferred, not completed or progress was not reported.

There was a decision made around the middle of last year in response to the funding. However, we are certainly open for funding of bodies such as the motor vehicle theft council if they have projects. I mentioned previously the community crime prevention program. I have written in response to a range of public commentary that has been made by the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council alerting them to funding that has been provided by our government for community crime prevention programs and indicating that they are open to make application, particularly in terms of — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — Minister, are you aware that the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, for example, is particularly disappointed by this decision?

**Mr SCOTT** — As I was saying, there is a capacity, and I wrote recently in fact to the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council in relation to these matters, indicating that there are grant programs, particularly in relation to the community crime prevention grants and place-based and targeted grants, which in part deal with emerging crime trends, and there is funding, as I said, of over \$10 million available in that particular — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — You have not really compelled me as to why you have cut \$300 000 from this important — —

**Mr SCOTT** — I indicated that the advice that was provided from the department to the then minister — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Ms Ward until 3.50 p.m.



**Ms WARD** — Thank you, Chair. We have spoken at some length this afternoon around employment within police numbers and employment within the police force. At the moment I would refer you to budget paper 2, page 12, where it talks about the increases to police officers and so on. What I am particularly interested in, though, is to drill down a bit and to have some response from you or the Chief Commissioner regarding the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission report into sexual harassment. Could you just outline quickly for the committee the key recommendations of this report?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — We commissioned that review when Ken Lay was Chief Commissioner because of what we were finding in the offending space, so we were finding police officers who were offending against other police officers in sexual harassment and even up to sexual offending. We started a task force, which was part of our professional standards command, to deal with that.

We were getting concerned by the amount of reporting and the nature of that and really when we sat down and discussed it we said, ‘We have clearly got a cultural problem here’. We discussed it with other police forces around the country and we said, ‘This is something that we need to try to actually grab and address proactively’. So we went to VEOHRC and engaged VEOHRC to do an independent review. We launched the review, published the review late last year. The review essentially set out in graphic detail some of the issues that we were having to deal with — some very poor experiences that are being received and then experienced by our female officers. Both police and VPS members are included in that. It set out a series of recommendations as to how we might address that. There are a series of structural recommendations. We have worked some of those into our most recent enterprise bargaining agreement. Maternity leave was — —

**Ms WARD** — Sorry, just to interrupt for a second, do you think that this problem that has been experienced at Vic police has also made it a challenge for some officers to respond to situations out in the community that they have found themselves in as well?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Absolutely, and mental health, a real challenge. It is not the only reason but an important reason we address it, but we have responsibilities to our people to make sure that we are a safe workplace.

**Ms WARD** — That is right.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — So the structural issues, for example, with maternity leave, where we believe that female officers were actually reluctant to take maternity leave because they would come off rosters and it is not an immediate process to replace them. So we are very keen to develop a process where we can supplement rosters when officers are on maternity leave. There are structural issues like that that we must address.

I have Assistant Commissioner Luke Cornelius working full time on this. He came from southern metro region. So we are applying a very high-level response, and he has a team dedicated towards the response on this, leading the response. We are making sure that all of our police command and senior leaders absolutely get this and are selling the right message to our workforce. That is a big part of this as well.

**Ms WARD** — Have you also got female officers involved in this process as well?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, absolutely. I could not tell you actuals, but certainly in the actual core team I think it might be even a majority of those who are female officers. There is also making sure that we have appropriate representation of women in the force, both in sworn and VPS, so we are making sure that we improve those numbers. Certainly our most recently recruit courses have all had over 50 per cent female representation on them as they have been going through the academy. Culturally it is a big challenge to make sure that we can get cultural change. That really comes back to challenging behaviours and not allowing exclusionary behaviour, crude jokes, those sorts of things to be tolerated. If they are jumped on straightaway, you do not create the breeding ground for this to occur.

We hope that this will actually be, and it is already turning out to be, a set of work that others are following, so we are getting interest from all the other Australian police forces in what we are doing. A number of them are doing their own reviews. Within the emergency services sector as well there is now interest in doing reviews of those, so whilst this has been very confronting for Victoria Police, we hope that the work that we will be doing here will create a safer workplace for the women in the organisation and also set a benchmark for others to

follow to try to make sure that the levels of sexual harassment and gender inequality that are taking place across society, that we have a stab at addressing that as well.

**Mr SCOTT** — Just in terms of the government, if I could add that the department of justice and Victoria Police are working together on how a number of these recommendations can be implemented. The government certainly welcomes the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's report on sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police. It is a very important report. We also welcome the commitment of the police at a leadership level to the implementation of this report, which I think is really important for ensuring the police force represents the society that we live in today, particularly in the year 2016.

My understanding is that there was an initial establishment cost of \$10.7 million, which was approved from internal reprioritisations by Victoria Police to fund the establishment of the VEOHRC review response partnership and innovation office, independent advisory structures, workplace harm model, victim support services and the HR business partnership model. This is something that the government welcomes the response from Victoria Police. There is a review that has been initiated by the Special Minister of State — an ongoing integrity review. The ongoing review will consider the VEOHRC recommendations and consider legislative barriers to Victoria Police personnel discussing protected disclosures with WorkSafe and other service providers. This issue was also identified in the February 2016 IBAC committee of Parliament report.

**Ms SHING** — Minister and Chief Commissioner, just to continue on the theme of workplace culture and the importance of creating and maintaining a positive and collaborative workplace culture, what is Victoria Police doing in relation to creating and fostering a better inclusive culture for culturally and linguistically diverse members, whether they are sworn or VPS; LGBTI members, whether they are sworn or VPS; and Indigenous members, whether they are sworn or VPS, in addition to the work that is being done to improve culture for women in the force?

**Mr SCOTT** — I will make a couple of comments. In another portfolio, as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, it is difficult to attend a function where the police get to speak without them calling for recruits. I think it is a really proactive view that is taken. I know particularly Deputy Commissioner Andrew Crisp has a particular fondness for standing up and giving a very enthusiastic recruiting message, because it is really important that the police force represents the diversity of our society both in terms of giving an avenue for people to serve the community, who are newer migrants, and give service to the community which has given them a home through the protection that the police provides for society but also so that the police are better able to address crime and the risk of offending amongst the diverse society we live in.

In terms of LGBTI, and I will refer to the commissioner in a second, there are LGBTI liaison officers stationed at various police stations throughout Victoria with an understanding of issues specific to members of the LGBTI communities. Of course people should feel free to report crime to any police member. I will get the Chief Commissioner to supplement.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — I guess I could give you a long list of diversity action plans and all that, which I have got in these papers.

**Ms SHING** — I would love to take that on notice in terms of the detailed information, but in terms of the thematic progress being made towards a more inclusive workforce, if you could comment on that, Chief Commissioner.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Actually there is an absolutely holistic commitment to doing that — to make sure that it is a more inclusive workforce — and it has a number of subsets to it: obviously making sure that we have a gender diversity, making sure we have equal representation and better representation in the gender space, and trying to make sure that in relation to cultural diversity we are as diverse as we can be. We understand Victoria is a rich multicultural state, the richest in Australia in terms of multicultural representation, so it is important Victoria Police also has that representation.

It is true that Victoria Police largely has officers that look like me or better looking versions of me and we have got to make sure that we are more reflective of society, so that we have got officers who are coming from all backgrounds. Certainly the recruitment work has been trying to focus on that. There are a number of good

people in emerging communities that are acting as, I guess, advisers to us about identifying good people that may want to come into Victoria Police. We have had some recent good success stories there as well.

**Ms SHING** — Is that part of the frontline investment in terms of the way in which relationships are built? I know in regional areas that is a key part of policing functions in terms of creating and maintaining relationships.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It is. Absolutely. Particularly in the Indigenous area in rural policing, where we really want to try to increase numbers. We have also been doing work on how people identify who are already in Victoria Police. We recently enhanced our HR system so that our staff can go in and actually properly identify their cultural backgrounds if they choose to do so.

**Ms SHING** — So information gathering and self-selection are more readily available as an option?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes. That is giving us good basis for understanding the make-up of our workforce.

**Ms SHING** — Excellent. I look forward to that being reflected in broader numbers as the force continues to recruit. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

**Mr T. SMITH** — If I could continue, Minister, my line of questioning previously about the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council. It is quite a mouthful, I agree.

**Mr SCOTT** — Yes. Particularly late on a Friday.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Going to your comments that your predecessor did not feel that that money was essentially adding value to programs. I think that was the form of words; I am not trying to verbal you here. But you used a form of words there which indicated some concern with regard to the programs. Could you respond?

**Mr SCOTT** — I am happy to respond and answer, because I do not think you are attempting to verbal me.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Genuinely, I am not.

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of the analysis that was provided to Mr Noonan, an analysis of the council's — this was what I stating — forward work plan indicated Victorian funding would be cross-subsidising one-off activities in other states which would have no benefit for Victorians. I went then to the poorish record of completing projects. An evaluation was undertaken by the department and a cost-benefit analysis. The council had stated that they had delivered \$276 million in economic benefits. However, the major economic benefits actually related to the flow-on impact of mandatory immobilisers implemented in 1999.

There was also an investment in Synergy Auto Repairs, a social enterprise partnership with Mission Australia and Suncorp insurance providing non-structural vehicle repairs, and that was intended to divert young offenders into training. The program cost \$282 000 in 2014–15 for eight participants, approximately \$35 200 each. There is no requirement, is the advice I have, that young people participating in that program have any background in motor vehicle theft. Now we have made significant investments in relation — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — Could you make that analysis available to the committee?

**Mr SCOTT** — I have given the evidence to the committee. I will see what further information may be appropriate. But we have made significant investments in community crime prevention in this budget. If there are programs from organisations such as the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council or other groups, we as a government are very keen for people to make application and very keen for applications to be made. We will judge those applications on their merits in order to ensure that the most effective allocation of resources is made to ensure that the community is benefiting from — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — There are two points, Minister. One: that diversion program that you made mention of, my advice is that was quite a successful program and it had proven itself. Secondly, in so much as you are suggesting that they should reapply for government programs and moneys, are you not suggesting that you probably should not have cut it in the first place?

**Mr SCOTT** — I think the question obviously was not referencing the answer. We will, on the merits, examine applications for funding under the community crime prevention programs, particularly in terms of the place-based and targeted grants where there is really scope to provide targeted interventions particularly looking at trends within crime. I think it is important that individuals or groups who seek to benefit the community by reducing crime — there should be a proper evaluation process which weighs the merits of different applications to ensure the Victorian community benefits most from those applications.

**Mr T. SMITH** — But, Minister, I might ask either the secretary or indeed the Chief Commissioner if any advice was provided to you on this subject or indeed to your predecessor? Is that possible?

**Mr WILSON** — There is advice provided for the purpose of this hearing which the minister said are the main points, but I would have to check what was provided to whom and when.

**The CHAIR** — This comes back to an earlier conversation today, Mr Smith. I think that if it comes down to a question about advice, that is really a matter for the minister to answer. You cannot expect public servants to provide running commentary on advice provided to a minister. But in relation to implementation, then that is something certainly I think that the public servant could talk to.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I accept that. That is fair enough.

**The CHAIR** — Maybe if you were to ask a question about whether the secretary might have a view of it.

**Mr T. SMITH** — What I am trying to get at is how the decision was reached, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — I think then that is really a question for the minister to respond to, but I think that the minister has broadly answered the question.

**Mr SCOTT** — I can provide some further information for the assistance of the member if that would be useful to the member.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Okay.

**Mr SCOTT** — I can provide you with some further information, through the Chair, if that would be of assistance to the member. The minister received advice. There was consultation from the department — you asked specifically — with the crime stats agency and other stakeholders, including a large number of councils.

**Mr T. SMITH** — What about Victoria Police?

**Mr SCOTT** — There were also discussions with the Victoria Police about the services. The minister's office asked the department to further consult with Victoria Police about the service functions provided by the council and the council's proposed future strategic works plan and ascertain Victoria Police's position on these matters. There was an earlier general support that was provided, which is I think in the public domain, from Acting Chief Commissioner Tim Cartwright in November 2015, supporting renewal of funding. That further advice took place subsequently.

**Mr T. SMITH** — So Mr Cartwright is on the record supporting the continuation of funding? So the former Chief Commissioner supported continuation of funding for this program?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Smith, I think I heard the minister say 'further funding', which might go back to the minister's earlier comment about providing grant funding for the NMVTRC.

**Mr SCOTT** — That was in January of 2015. There was then the further consultation with Victoria Police about the services and functions provided to the council and proposed future strategic work plan and ascertaining Victoria Police's on the matter. In terms of the estimates process, there is a capacity for there to be an application from the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council, and that will be judged on its merits.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Chief Commissioner, I just want to go to the two-up policy. There is reference at BP4, page 55. Everyone clearly supports the issue of making sure that our police officers are safe, and I know the coalition is supportive of that. The safety of our officers has to be the highest priority. But I know that there have been media reports about the resourcing implications of the two-up policy. I know even in Gippsland as

well, particularly in areas where there are one-man stations, we have effectively seen those stations closed because they cannot be operated on their own. Have you done any analysis of the resource implications of the policy?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, we do that work. We have made a number of adjustments for our rural policing, because we understand that reality is that one-member stations need to patrol on their own, so we have what is called cluster patrolling, so they are on their own but they are able to make sure that if they are going to matters they are thinking are high risk, the two of them will go to try to make sure that we minimise the impact. The major impact for the two-up policy is highway patrol, because highway patrol has traditionally been a one-up, and it is a highly visible police presence on the highways and high-risk road areas, so that is where it has had the biggest impact.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I have had one officer say to me, a sergeant, that in his area it is potentially — without putting an exact figure on it — costing them about 30 per cent of shifts. Would that surprise you?

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — It has resulted in also less infringements being issued as well as a result of that policy.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry. That was not just for highway patrol but more generally.

**Chief Comm. ASHTON** — Yes, although most of those infringements are highway patrol issue infringements, so we see a reduction in those. I have tried to make sure that we keep the door open on the two-up policy because I am aware of the impact around high visibility and want as many highly visible police as we can have doing that work. There was some intelligence in the counter-terrorism arena that led to that policy. Some of that played out publicly, with issues like Endeavour Hills and that sort of thing, but as the intel changes I have asked for those assessments to continue to be made, including at the moment. If there is an opportunity to reintroduce, for example, one-up highway patrol in light of the intel, then I am happy to do that. I have not closed the door to it, but just at the moment it is still two-up.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Great. Thank you. A quick one, Minister, if I may, BP4, page 57, relating to police custody officers. Are you satisfied, based on the recent attempted escape at Moorabbin police station, where a number of police officers were injured, that PCOs have the necessary training to manage potentially dangerous and volatile criminals?

**Mr SCOTT** — In terms of the advice, in fact I have discussed the training of police custody officers with police — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I warn you, Minister, you have got 10 seconds. Are you satisfied?

**Mr SCOTT** — and I was given a very positive and favourable response in terms of police custody officers and the work that they are undertaking and the training that they are undertaking. Sorry, I have run out of time.

**The CHAIR** — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Police, the Honourable Robin Scott, MP; Mr Wilson and Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response should be provided within 14 calendar days of that request.

**Witnesses withdrew.**