

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 23 May 2024

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Harriet Shing MLC, Minister for Housing; and

Peta McCammon, Secretary,

Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria,

Danny O’Kelly, Deputy Secretary, Community Operations and Practice Leadership,

Dannii de Kretser, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria,

Sonia Chudiak, Acting Executive Director, Homelessness and Housing Support,

Simon Duell, Acting Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Planning,

Martin McCurry, Acting Executive Director, Asset Management, Homes Victoria,

Jo Cushing, Executive Director, Performance and Governance, Homes Victoria,

Michele Morrison, Chief Development Officer, Housing Development, Homes Victoria,

Matthew Duggan, Executive Director, Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness, Homes Victoria, and

Anita-Marie Canals, Director, Program and Service Development, Family Safety Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

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

I ask that mobile telephones now be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates. The committee’s aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

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

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

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

I welcome the Minister for Housing the Honourable Harriet Shing – welcome – as well as officials from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement of no more than 5 minutes, after which time the committee will ask its questions. Your time starts now.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to present to you today on the budget and on the broader work that is happening within the housing portfolio. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands upon which we gather here today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I also want to acknowledge any and all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander leaders or emerging leaders who have joined us here today, who are part of the work in relation to the housing portfolio and indeed part of the discussions around truth-telling and reconciliation.

Visual presentation.

Harriet SHING: For the sake of clarity and for Mr Puglielli, Mr McGowan and Mrs McArthur, you will be well aware of the distinction that I have created and sought to educate people on around the housing portfolio and where and how that sits across the landscape of a number of portfolios, addressing that continuum, whether

it is private ownership, right through to rentals, the affordable housing space, social housing, crisis accommodation and homelessness services. The work that I have under the remit of the housing portfolio sits very squarely on the side of the housing continuum, as we call it, from homelessness and crisis support, residential supported accommodation and transitional housing right through to social and indeed an element of affordable housing.

To that end I am very pleased to be able to present on that part of the broader challenge that we have and the opportunities in investment as part of this government in the housing area more specifically. We know that the population is going to grow across Victoria to around 10.3 million people by 2051, and Melbourne will be the largest city in Australia – in fact by current estimates it has just achieved that title. And we have a range of commitments, including through the Big Housing Build, the Regional Housing Fund, the partnerships that we have with the Commonwealth, and supported housing partnerships and homelessness support services around this particular area of need for people who are at the more vulnerable end of the spectrum. We know that the demand on homelessness support services has continued to increase, and we are seeing a large uptake in support from the private rental market. We also know that increasing the total stock around social housing supply and affordable housing is one way that we can lean into that demand and the challenges of vulnerability whilst also making sure that we can deliver on a range of housing supply solutions for people across the board.

We want renters to have a really great place to live. We know that amenity and the condition of properties is an important part of that measure of satisfaction, and we also want to make sure that traditional owners are at the heart of a very concerted and proactive approach to addressing disadvantage, including through the framework *Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home*. We want to work and partner with the specialist homelessness services sector, including through the investments made in this year's budget, the \$300 million that is already there, on top of an additional \$196 million. We also want to make sure that we can continue that investment as part of the Big Housing Build, because we know that one of the ways to address homelessness – it seems logical but it is in fact part of a complexity of challenge – is having homes.

When we look at building more homes and addressing people's needs, we can see in the graph that is on the screen at the moment that we have seen an increase in the number of applications up to around 2023, with a decrease occurring in the 2023–24 period, and the total number of homes is in fact increasing over that period. This shows that the work we are doing that is very much geared towards addressing shortfall and providing dwellings, as well as updating and upgrading ageing stock, is having that impact. It is no accident. It is happening because of record investment in capital and in recurrent expenditure. Supportive housing places in 2018–26 show a significant increase as well.

Next slide, please. Commonwealth investment: we know that we need to do more in the partnerships that we have with the Commonwealth. We have not seen that corresponding level of investment across the multijurisdictional space, but we are getting there. Seeing that we have that \$496 million through the social housing accelerator fund for 679 new homes, as well as the work that we have delivered through the recent federal budget, we will continue to see that change.

Next slide, please. We are also retiring our older high-rise stock to make sure that we can ensure people have somewhere to live that they can be really proud of – that is bright, modern, energy-efficient; that is close to the amenity and community that make for livability; that enables people to be able to access homes that are current and compliant with the standards that apply for building now. This is where tranche 1 of the relocation site and high-rise renter engagement is of crucial importance.

There is so much to talk about, but I have run out of time. But the key achievements are listed in that slide. We will continue to work towards achieving them, and I look forward to taking any questions from the committee as this work goes on.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Minister. The first 7 minutes will go to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I refer you to the 'Department Performance Statement', page 176. Between June 2020 and June 2023 there was a decrease of 1360 bedrooms in public housing stock. The Big Housing Build apparently aims to increase public housing stock by 10 per cent, but it is slashing housing bedroom availability. Why are we reducing the number of places where people can sleep, Minister?

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mrs McArthur, for that question. We are not. One of the things we know is that demand for housing and the demographic change that we see are geared predominantly towards addressing need. Overwhelmingly the need that we see exists for studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments. This is where making sure that we can address that demographic's need we are catering to again the vulnerabilities that are experienced by some of the most disadvantaged cohorts accessing social housing. We also know that as part of the downsizing challenge, one which we are all familiar with, by making sure we can build housing across lots and titles in multiples of, say, one- and two-bedroom units rather than people rattling around in a three- or four-bedroom home, we are then reducing the demand on the housing system, and this reflects what that need is now and also reflects what the need will be on forecast modelling.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, less bedrooms, Minister, means less rooms to sleep, but anyway. The Big Housing Build investment has transferred \$496 million of the \$740 million Big Housing Build funds to community housing. How many homes will this build?

Harriet SHING: How many homes will what build, Mrs McArthur?

Bev McARTHUR: The Big Housing Build funds to community housing. You have transferred \$496 million of the \$740 million Big Housing Build funds to community housing. How many community housing homes will this build?

Harriet SHING: We have a mix of social housing which comprises community housing and public housing. When we committed to the Big Housing Build – and we have got more than 9400 homes that are either complete or underway and we are tracking to achieve at least 16,000 homes by 2027 – that is a mix between the public housing component of the stock that we are building and refurbishing and community housing. What I do want to make clear to the committee is that when we talk to social housing, this is all about homes that are delivered to address the waitlist. So if you are on the waitlist and you nominate taking community housing, you will then be allotted to a community home, which means that you can have access to a Commonwealth rental assistance payment or indeed to those supports that exist in those for-purpose not-for-profit organisations which are funded by government. So I do want to make it really clear that we are continuing to build those homes, including through partnerships – the ground lease model and consortia – in a way that will see that we are able to deliver those allocations and that we can make sure that we are delivering the total output cost and the budgetary allocations, the \$634.3 million, and the way in which we will reallocate money, including to the family violence portfolio and additional funding to a range of outputs around the full budget for housing assistance.

Bev McARTHUR: I am glad you have gone there, Minister, because that is a great segue.

Harriet SHING: I thought we might be in sync already, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Absolutely, yes.

Harriet SHING: It only took us a couple of minutes, but we got there.

Bev McARTHUR: I know. So despite having a target of 10.4 months, women escaping family violence are now waiting 23.6 months for secure housing. Are women and children escaping family violence having to wait two years for housing because there simply are not enough social housing bedrooms to accommodate them?

Harriet SHING: Firstly, family violence remains –

Bev McARTHUR: Somebody else's portfolio.

Harriet SHING: Mrs McArthur, I really want to address this question with a level of detail that it deserves. Family violence remains not only the number one law-and-order issue in the state of Victoria, but I would say around Australia. It also remains a key priority of the allocations around funding to address that crisis accommodation, the transitional housing, the refuge and cluster models and indeed around a thousand homes as part of the Big Housing Build. We do have more work to do in terms of providing support to see that victims and survivors of family violence can move into secure, long-term accommodation over time. We do have a lot of work to do to make sure that we can provide wraparound and specialist homelessness services and support to

victims and survivors of family violence. We are starting to see a downturn in the wait times for people who are victim-survivors of family violence. There is a lot more work to do however, and that is where –

Bev McARTHUR: They are waiting twice as long, Minister, under your big build. It has increased every year.

Harriet SHING: We have seen the numbers of people who are accessing family violence support services continue to exponentially increase. We are seeing –

Bev McARTHUR: There has been no downturn, Minister.

Harriet SHING: In terms of the waiting times, there is a downturn, Mrs McArthur. We are looking at about 20.4 months now, down from –

Bev McARTHUR: As opposed to 24 months.

Harriet SHING: Well, every little bit helps, Mrs McArthur. When we see a three-month reduction, that is a three-month reduction. In addition to that, when we talk about the \$6.3 billion of investment, we talk about the 2766 people who have accessed private rental support. We do know that family violence victims and survivors are a big part of that. We have also seen, through partnerships with the Commonwealth – and these are really effective partnerships, because we know we need a joined-up approach to tackling the national problem and the challenges of family violence – that it is those initiatives, including as a share of the \$1 billion fund that the Commonwealth announced as part of its budget to direct that share in a 25 per cent allocation to family violence supports and crisis accommodation –

Bev McARTHUR: Minister, can you give us some evidence about the change in the months? What evidence can you give us that it is now 20 months, not 24?

Harriet SHING: Well, this is data that is published, Mrs McArthur. The average waiting times for family violence –

Bev McARTHUR: What document are we referring to?

Harriet SHING: This is on the register. The average waiting times for family violence priority allocations from 1 July 2023 to 31 January 2024 have been for public housing, 21.8 months; community housing, 14.8 months; with a total of 19.9 months. We do want to make sure that we are continuing to provide support though, including through wraparound. Again I do want to acknowledge the work of Women's Housing in Victoria and again a range of other support services, particularly within the homelessness sector, who do such important work as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister, Secretary and officials. Thank you for joining us. Minister, in your presentation you talked about how Victoria's population is expected to reach 10.3 million by 2051 and that Melbourne will be approximately the same size as London by then. Budget paper 4, pages 17 and 18, outline the partnerships through the ground lease model that the government is pursuing to deliver more community housing for our state's growing population. Minister, what is the difference between public housing and community housing, and are there certain benefits of delivering one of these models over the other?

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Galea, for this question. Again it is something which I have taken the chamber through on a number of occasions, and again we continue to have discussions about as we deliver on this housing stock. So here it is again. Public housing is housing that is provided, maintained and owned by the state directly. It is housing which when people take up a tenancy in it they come off the housing register. That is a commonality with community housing – people who are accessing community housing are also coming off the housing register, or the waitlist. We know that there are a number of key distinctions however that often drive pretty animated discussion about the way in which social housing is delivered. We have, for avoidance of any doubt, a really, really strong partnership with community housing providers in Victoria. We have a mature community housing sector here in the state, and that is one of the reasons why we have been able to partner

with them, including in developing and delivering what is called the ground lease model, the ground lease model 1, and now 2 is part of a second iteration of that.

Community housing providers are accredited providers. They are not-for-profit organisations. They are for-purpose organisations. They also have charitable status. They are also funded by government in terms of being able to deliver housing that often has a range of bespoke wraparound services. This might be Aboriginal Housing Victoria. It might be Women's Housing Limited, who provide again that very specific support for that growing cohort of women aged 50 and above or victim-survivors of family violence, which is something that Mrs McArthur took us to earlier.

We also know that we need to provide wraparound supports and services, including through partnerships with Kids Under Cover, Haven Home Safe and others, for young people. Every night, for example, Kids Under Cover houses around a thousand young people and about 25 per cent of those people are First Nations young people. So again this is where it taps into a range of the areas of disadvantage to assist people not only to get a roof over their heads but also to get that support that they need to manage a range of often very complex challenges. Now, this sits alongside a range of other supports whether that is in the family violence portfolio, which I think Minister Ward and Minister Hutchins have gone through, or indeed in the youth portfolio.

We do need to make sure also that we understand that building more social housing comprises a mix of community and public housing. We are able also, though, to partner with the Commonwealth. When we look at the social housing accelerator fund, that is an amount of about \$496.5 million that will deliver around 679 homes. The Carlton red brick towers, which people would be well familiar with, have been empty for some time. They will be redeveloped, including through that partnership with the Commonwealth, as part of what we do to develop and deliver on those tower sites – the 44 sites.

The ground lease model is another really important part of this work. This is where a community housing provider or a consortium will partner with a developer and work alongside them to develop, maintain and operate homes, getting therefore a rent base, and then after a period of time with a lease return that lease and that land to Homes Victoria whereupon that will transfer back again to the state. So there are a number of hybrid ways to address need and to address supply and that also sits alongside the affordable housing space as well, where there are a range of criteria that apply for people who want to get into that space with that capped quantum of payment required. There are also rental caps in social housing – 25 per cent for public housing, up to 30 per cent for community housing. But as I said in the latter housing, in community housing, there is a rebate through the Commonwealth rental assistance scheme.

So it is a lot. It is really complex. It is a system that has a number of interlinking components, but we need all of them to come together to make sure that we can deliver on increased housing supply, specialist housing for people with often very complex needs, housing that is proximate to communities, including in our growth areas, including as we face the challenges of population growth, and sitting alongside other types of housing as well. When we talk about housing, we want to make sure that this is not a situation whereby we are saying social housing tenants need to be in one confined area of a community and everybody else can be everywhere else. We want to make sure that we are tackling that discrimination that often has existed, the stigma that has often existed. Again, social cohesion is driven by the idea of connection to community. We know that there is a really strong sense of community and satisfaction within community housing; the Commonwealth renter survey has actually borne that out. We also know that there are high levels of connection within community housing that are really born about because of the wraparound services and support that are provided within the model.

We also know that there is a lot of work to be done, and this is where again the Commonwealth has been central to that work to make sure that we can get that joined-up approach. When we talk about the instruments that sit alongside – definitions of 'affordable', for example – the models that exist at a federal level, that operate across a range of jurisdictions with lots of different meanings, we know that there is still a lot of work to do, but we also know that social housing in Victoria has received investment unlike any other jurisdiction – we have the largest investment in social housing across the board in that \$6.3 billion plus the additional money from this year's budget on specialist homelessness, maintenance and other services and supports. But this is ongoing work – it is multidecade work. The work to address disadvantage never actually stops. There is no finish line, and that is why again it is this aggregate of investments that has taken priority in this budget and indeed previous budgets.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. We will go back to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. I go to budget paper 4, page 151, and a chart which actually shows us, in your annual report, that there has only been an increase of 868 homes since 2019. How do you explain that?

Harriet SHING: Mrs McArthur, what I can say is that that is a net figure in terms of what we have delivered. So we want to focus on the work that we have delivered overall, which shows very clearly that we have increased the number of social homes by about 3500 in gross terms over the previous year. We do want to make sure that we are continuing to deliver on that work, and it would be a contrivance I think to suggest that it is only a net increase that counts for the purposes of building new housing stock. Housing stock, which we also spend a significant amount to maintain and to upgrade and to improve, is not going to last forever. As you would expect, as I would expect, as any tenant should expect, a minimum level of standards is also part of the contract to deliver social housing. So we get to the point where maintenance upgrades and improvements cannot take us any further, and we also get to a situation where increased new social housing stock is part of that work. So we are looking at around 3500 new homes over the period in gross terms. Again, talking about net increase does not actually reflect the work that is happening.

Bev McARTHUR: Minister, why is the target number of social homes for 2024–25 less by 100 than the number of target homes for 2023–24? Page 47 of your ‘Department Performance Statement’.

Harriet SHING: So this comes down I think, Mrs McArthur, to what you are referring to on disposals and how many homes are being disposed of during the 2023–24 and 2024–25 period. Of that period, 2850 additions have been made in 2023–24, which incorporates 1296 disposals; 2379 additions in 2024–25, which incorporates 974 disposals; and 5229 additions between 2023 and 2025, with 2270 disposals. So again that gives you –

Danny O’BRIEN: There is less public and social housing stock.

Harriet SHING: No, that is not correct.

Danny O’BRIEN: Page 47, that is what it says – it is 100 less than it was last year.

Bev McARTHUR: We might have to stop the clock while they search through the paper.

Harriet SHING: Sorry, I am having a look at the budget paper that you have referred to. Mr O’Brien, it is not correct to assert that we are losing housing stock.

Danny O’BRIEN: Page 47 –

Harriet SHING: The actual is 88,189 and the expected is 89,743. So that reflects additions and subtractions, which are part of the ongoing program to ensure that houses are suitable for renters, which is what I just took you to.

Bev McARTHUR: Minister, 60,000 families are waiting for a house. 868 houses just does not cut it, does it? Net increase is everything. You are selling more homes than you can build; 60,000 families are waiting for a home.

Harriet SHING: The homes that we are building, Mrs McArthur, are the ones that people will be able to live in with a greater level of amenity and comfort than the older stock that we are replacing.

Bev McARTHUR: But at the moment they are in their cars, Minister.

Harriet SHING: We have invested, Mrs McArthur, since 2014, \$9.8 billion in housing.

Bev McARTHUR: But the housing stock is not growing, Minister. You are going backwards.

Harriet SHING: That includes the acquisition of more than 14,000 homes, and we have added a net total of 4544 houses to the total dwelling numbers since 2013–14. So our net total increase in stock from June 2022 to

June 2024 is expected to rise by 2856 dwellings, and that includes the addition of nearly \$2 billion in investments in the last 12 months. That is the regional housing build; \$436 million towards the public housing revitalisation program; \$496 million, which I just took you through, from the Commonwealth. And alongside the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, we are going to see at least 15,000 new homes for Victorians by 2029. If you are saying we should not be retiring homes, Mrs McArthur, then that does a great disservice to people who deserve in fact homes that comply with contemporary standards.

Bev McARTHUR: But what about the people waiting now? We are concerned with the people waiting now. Let us go, Minister, to how much of the \$5.3 billion in funding for social housing is spent on Homes Victoria administration. Perhaps a departmental person might have that figure.

Harriet SHING: I will get a departmental person to address that question. But before I do, I just want to take you up on something you referred to earlier with the total number of applications on the Victorian housing register. We have actually seen a decrease by 2105 applications. It has gone from 60,564 to 58,459. Again, these are incremental improvements from the period of the quarter from December 2023 to March 2024. Over the 12 months –

Bev McARTHUR: Over 50,000 people are waiting for a house, Minister.

Harriet SHING: Well, you have just cut the number by 10,000, Mrs McArthur, in the question that you have asked.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, 50,000, 60,000.

Harriet SHING: Over the 12 months to the March 2024 quarter the total number of applications decreased by 9526.

Bev McARTHUR: Perhaps the figure on administration.

Harriet SHING: That is a 14 per cent decline, Mrs McArthur

Bev McARTHUR: I think we have got a departmental answer coming up.

Harriet SHING: So we are performing well above the national average, Mrs McArthur – just to be really quick.

Bev McARTHUR: Can we have the answer, please?

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mrs McArthur, your time is up. We are going to go to Mr Tak.

Bev McARTHUR: Can we have the answer, or take it on notice?

The CHAIR: No, Mrs McArthur, we are not doing that at the end of our time. How you use your time is up to you, but once the time is up –

Bev McARTHUR: No, no.

Danny O'BRIEN: A point of order, Chair.

The CHAIR: A point of order, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: With respect to us, the minister actually said, 'Yes, I'll get someone to give you the answer to that,' and then proceeded to provide further information about an earlier question. I think it is only fair that the department now be allowed to answer the question that was asked.

The CHAIR: On the point of order, Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: The minister was responding to what we found out to be wrong statements that were made by the member in question, and it is right to correct the record.

Danny O'BRIEN: She is entitled to do that, but she also has to answer the question.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, we will be coming back this way, so perhaps we can raise it during that time. We are going to move on.

Danny O'BRIEN: Perhaps the department could answer it in your time, Mr Hilakari. If the minister wants to correct the record, do it in your time.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, it is not up for discussion. We are swinging back this way. We are moving forward to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Minister, Secretary and officials. Minister, you spoke to Mr Galea about partnerships. Can you please explain what partnering with industry means? Is this another way to say that the government is privatising public housing?

Harriet SHING: Thank you for that question. It is an interesting question coming from a government member rather than perhaps Mr Puglielli – and I suspect there may be a synergy there in terms of questions you might well get to with your allotted time.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr O'Brien.

Harriet SHING: Is this our 11th PAEC together, Mr O'Brien? I think it might be –

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: It is a decade. Happy anniversary, Mr O'Brien; it is always a pleasure. What I would say to that argument is that where government is funding the delivery of housing and government is working in partnership with these not-for-profit, for-purpose organisations, whether that is the Sacred Heart Mission, the Salvation Army, Women's Housing Victoria, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Haven Home Safe, Mind, Ozanam House et cetera, et cetera, the work needs to go on in a way that provides whole-person support. We need to deploy a range of different approaches in addressing the often very complex needs of people in a space of great vulnerability, and this is where these partnerships form a really great way for us to lean into that disadvantage and to create a measure of significant empowerment for people often who are in the process of breaking some really, really trauma-based, trauma-informed cycles. So through that partnership with community housing providers we are able to make sure the people can have that access to support. When I have been to housing developments for people with complex mental health conditions, people who are victim-survivors of family violence, people who are perhaps exiting the correctional system, there are different approaches to the way in which we make sure that they are living well and living safely, and that is where the community housing sector is really well placed to assist with that work.

We also know that in the partnerships that community housing providers have with developers and with government we are able to see the development, the build, the maintenance and the operation of housing in a way that provides the best measure of autonomy for the people who are in fact driving these very investments. So we often see an overlap between the sorts of specialist homelessness services and supports that are provided there right through to the housing, whether it is affordable or social housing, from within the community housing space, and continuity of care, wraparound, and that cross-pollination of exchange of information, supports, whether that is moving from a refuge and crisis accommodation into temporary housing or into something more permanent, including as part of affordable housing. That is where again it is those relationships, those contracts and agreements that are part of doing that work.

I think to call it a privatised environment, as has been asserted, does a great disservice to the community housing providers and the social and community services sector workers who are really at the heart of these whole-of-life improvements and opportunities for people who are really deserving of them, people who have come from some of the most complex and challenging circumstances imaginable.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. Is it more cost-effective for governments to partner with community housing providers then?

Harriet SHING: There are a range of different elements to that. So when we talk about 'cost effective', cost is not just measured in terms of the economic investment – it is also about the return on investment and the way

in which people remain in tenancies. We know that in community housing, for example, people remain in tenancies longer, eviction rates are lower. We know that satisfaction in terms of amenity and social cohesion, the renter experience, performs really, really well in community housing. This is where again it is also about drawing on the skills and expertise of the sector in providing that whole-person, wraparound care, and that has a long-term, downstream impact on the cost that might otherwise be needed to be met by government, whether that is the state government or the Commonwealth government.

We also know the Productivity Commission is starting to turn its mind to what long-term benefit and a return on investment looks like in exactly this space. We are starting to see analogously that where we have those investments as we have turned our mind to in the family violence royal commission, in the mental health royal commission and implementation of those recommendations that it is the downstream benefit through increased participation in employment, through increased connection to education and training pathways, to better health and mental health outcomes, that that is actually one of the benefits that we also see through the community housing partnerships that we have and that are a really valuable part of the work that we do. The Commonwealth is also recognising this, and this is where again the engagement that we have with the Commonwealth government now is vastly different to the one that we had over recent years. To see that that work on Housing Australia, the Housing Australia Future Fund and the partnerships on social housing have come to fruition shows that we are actually able to combine that investment to get an aggregate impact that meets the needs of Victoria now but that also reflects our record investment across social housing as well.

Meng Heang TAK: Does that mean the government is going to stop building social housing?

Harriet SHING: We are going to continue to build social housing. We have that record investment, as I said. We have invested \$9.8 billion since 2014. No other jurisdiction has invested this much in housing over that time. In the last year we have seen \$2 billion invested. This is again about making sure that we are funding that work and that we are providing support to the workforce, including through the equal remuneration order and the work that we are doing to ensure that workforce capacity is there, and that we can make sure that we are building that infrastructure as well as using that recurrent funding on specialist homelessness and early intervention and prevention.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tak. We are going to go to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Minister, how are you?

Harriet SHING: Hello, Mr McGowan. I am well, thank you. How are you going?

Nick McGOWAN: Lovely to see you – lovely to see with chocolates and lollies.

Harriet SHING: Which ones did you get?

Nick McGOWAN: Well, my colleague got the Royals, which was appropriate for her, but I see there are no republicans for me.

Bev McARTHUR: Long live the monarchy.

Nick McGOWAN: I will get right down to matters.

Harriet SHING: Mr McGowan, there are other biscuits along the table if your colleagues would like to share.

Nick McGOWAN: No republican biscuits there.

Harriet SHING: I could have bought you tiny teddies, but that seemed inappropriate.

Nick McGOWAN: Chocolate teddies are my favourite, but nonetheless –

Harriet SHING: I will remember that the next time.

Mathew HILAKARI: Chocolate tiny teddies.

Nick McGOWAN: I will not pick up the ‘tiny’ reference, thank you, Minister. Sorry. Eight hundred thousand new homes are going to be built, as we know. Forgive my ignorance here, but how many of those are going to be social housing? Do we have a figure, of the 800,000, for what is proposed for social housing?

Harriet SHING: Well, my objective for the forward estimates, so for the budget period that I am addressing here, is that we will build north of 16,000 social and affordable homes around the state. That is part of the ongoing investment that we are making, including in partnership with the Commonwealth. The target that you have referred to is a 10-year target, so again it is a bit hard to compare the budget that we are in with a decade across those other portfolios that I have talked to in my opening remarks.

Nick McGOWAN: It is an associated question. Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Of the \$5.3 billion funding for social housing, do we know how much of that is spent on Homes Victoria administration?

Harriet SHING: The CEO of Homes Vic is at last going to get a shot. Mr Newport, over to you.

Simon NEWPORT: Thank you, Minister. Just under 6.5 per cent is the total figure for overheads, project management and associated costs. We are talking about an eight-year period, and it is about \$43 million per year, so just under 6.5 per cent, which compares pretty favourably to other infrastructure projects and programs.

Nick McGOWAN: And is the 6.5 per cent the target, or is that the actual?

Simon NEWPORT: It is both, so we are on budget.

Nick McGOWAN: You are hitting that target?

Simon NEWPORT: It is a fraction below budget.

Nick McGOWAN: Perhaps you might like to do some of our schools as well.

Harriet SHING: Sorry, could you just repeat that for the record? It is a fraction below budget, I think, Mr McGowan.

Nick McGOWAN: No, target.

Harriet SHING: Yes, okay.

Nick McGOWAN: Good try, though, Minister. Nonetheless, Minister, in respect to the \$1.1 million that is being provided for food relief to support tenants in social housing, do we know how that is going to be distributed – that funding?

Bev McARTHUR: The department might have an answer.

Harriet SHING: We do. I am happy to talk about operational allocations through the department, Ms de Kretser, if you want to take that one.

Dannii de KRETSEK: Sure. We are working through that at the moment. There are a range of services that sit around high-rise buildings as well as broadacre estates, and we are working through an allocation with our regions, looking at the needs of those services and where we know there are pressures in tenants’ incomes and household stresses, and that will be going out by 1 July.

Nick McGOWAN: If you could make a small allocation to the electorate of Ringwood, that would be much appreciated.

Harriet SHING: Sorry, just to be clear, that sits alongside the additional funding that we have got for food insecurity support across the neighbourhood house network as well, and that is often also accessed by people in social housing, Mr McGowan, if that provides you with additional support.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, Minister.

Bev McARTHUR: Just let us be clear here, Minister: we have got \$2 billion invested in your portfolio, and we have got less homes. Perhaps Mr Newport could answer. Do you confirm that?

Harriet SHING: Well, we just do not. Mr Newport, you might wish to take that up. You might have a better job convincing Mrs McArthur than I obviously have had.

Simon NEWPORT: Thanks, Minister. Look, I think what you are referring to is a target from one year compared to the actual, so I do understand where that number is coming from. I have got year to year –

Bev McARTHUR: Do people have to die – to get a house here in Victoria if they are on the waitlist – for somebody to get a house?

Simon NEWPORT: No, they do not. What I can see is that there has been steady growth certainly over the last few years. This year we expect to grow the stock net by about 1500; the year before was 1300 and we expect to grow the stock next year by just short of a similar number.

I am sure you are all aware of the administrative issue that took place back about four or five years ago with community housing, which I think, unfortunately, does put paid to some of those earlier years. But that did not result in any actual net physical houses not existing. That was an administrative error, which I know everybody is aware of. Even taking that into account, over the last five years there have been 4117 extra net properties delivered.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay.

Harriet SHING: Back to that graph, though, also, Mrs McArthur, we are seeing that downturn in the total number of applications on the register at the same time that we are seeing that upswing in the stock that is being delivered. That might give you a measure of comfort around what is happening across the state.

Bev McARTHUR: I am so comforted, Minister, I cannot tell you.

Harriet SHING: I hoped you would be, Mrs McArthur. I hoped you would be.

Bev McARTHUR: Minister, let us go to the \$1 billion from the Commonwealth Games which has been allocated to regional housing, of which nearly \$300 million is allocated to output funding. Will the \$300 million go towards bricks-and-mortar buildings, or is this for administration? Mr Newport, do you have that figure?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes. The bulk of that money – I will have to provide the exact number to you on notice if that is okay –

Bev McARTHUR: That will be terrific.

Simon NEWPORT: But the vast majority of that money is set aside for partnerships with community housing providers. It is not shown as capital because it will not end up on the balance sheet of Homes Victoria, it will end up with the community housing providers. So the answer to your question in essence is, yes, of course it will result in houses being delivered with that money.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, you will give us the detail, though, on notice.

Simon NEWPORT: Absolutely.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you so much.

Harriet SHING: At least 1300 social and affordable homes are provided that \$1 billion regional fund.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes. Will any of the initial \$1.25 billion funding for regional homes include upgrade of homes as opposed to new builds, Mr Newport? Or is that somebody else's –

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, I can answer that question.

Bev McARTHUR: Great.

Simon NEWPORT: There is an amount of money – in fact we will have about 145 homes restored or upgraded and brought back into service. Seventy-five of those have already taken place, and the other 70-odd actually the trades are onsite at the moment, and they will be finished in the next three to four months.

Harriet SHING: And what that does, Mrs McArthur –

Bev McARTHUR: And, Mr Newport, while you are getting material on notice for us, could you provide the detail of the total number of homes for the last three years that you have built?

Simon NEWPORT: In total for the portfolio?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes.

Harriet SHING: Built or brought on line – because, again, if we have got vacant stock that is vacant for purposes including that it is not fit for purpose –

Bev McARTHUR: New homes.

Harriet SHING: and we are bringing that back online because of those capital improvements –

Bev McARTHUR: Well, okay, the total number of homes.

Harriet SHING: We just want to clarify what that total number looks like, so perhaps we will take that on notice.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, great.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister and officials. Minister, there is a really great explanation around the sort of intergenerational inequality existing in housing in BP2 on page 19. It talks to the average number of years of household income required to purchase a house and how that has changed over time. It shot up about the time I finished high school around the turn of the century. With that rising inequality that exists in the housing market, the housing statement actions to address that – can you expand on the details of why that is important?

Harriet SHING: Yes, absolutely. We know that financial distress is being felt by households everywhere. When we look at the increase in the cash rate and the Reserve Bank's decisions in recent times with successive interest rate increases and we also look at the 2.1 per cent increase in rents over the last 12 months, we know that people are doing it tough. This is where, again, the challenge that people have in meeting the cost of their rents when there is an availability shortfall – and we know that vacancy rates across rental markets are very, very low. It is not only difficult to find a home, it is also difficult to manage any increases to rent that might occur. This is where affordable housing plays a very important role in the way in which we deliver assistance to the question of affordability.

We have also provided private rental assistance to about 2766 households in the last year, and we want to make sure that we are alleviating those pressures in a range of different ways. Where we are not in a position to do more directly because of the way in which rental settings occur, there are a range of other means by which we can reduce the outgoings for household budgets. That includes, for example, the energy efficiency upgrade programs, retrofitting appliances. Giving people new homes means that also they are spending less on their bills. When we go, for example, to Ascot Vale, there is a development there with the community energy system of rooftop solar, that means that people are actually able to use solar from their own rooftops to power their homes, with the remainder going back into the grid. It is these sorts of initiatives, along with it might be the Victorian default offer, it might be the assistance we are providing for a range of other supports around utilities bills, it might be the household discretionary income not having to go to the sorts of things that the education minister and the Premier and the Treasurer have taken you to.

It takes an aggregate, however, to address some of the financial distress that sits at the heart of inequality and of disadvantage, and again you are right to identify the total proportion of income over an increasing number of years that puts additional strain on people's capacity to enter anything other than the rental market. We also know, and this is an oft-quoted statistic which I think is really important to put on the record here, around 30 per cent of the people accessing homelessness services for the first time are coming from the private rental market. This is where Minister Williams, I suspect, has taken you through some of the residential tenancies changes that are happening, whether that is on underquoting, increases to rents, the challenges around eviction

and the creation of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria or whether it is around making sure that we can have clarity in terms of the way in which tenants and landlords determine and implement the terms of the leases.

So that sits adjacent to the housing portfolio, but we do know that inequity and disadvantage bites in so many different ways within the housing space. Bringing new stock online, bringing better stock online, upgrading and maintaining and improving existing stock and having a long pipeline for delivery of more homes into the market as the population grows is the collective way in which we address those challenges.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. You spoke a bit there about Minister Williams and her responsibilities, and you have got the responsibilities for housing under the housing statement, so there is that intersection between different portfolios. How do you see that strengthening the response to the housing statement?

Harriet SHING: There are a number of areas here which do intersect very clearly. We do have, for example, the *Residential Tenancies Act* and the regulation by that Act of housing, including social and affordable housing. We also know that it is investment around the way in which people can escalate complaints, can raise maintenance issues, and it is about a consistency of service delivery and of the way in which people can have their needs met. When we talk to dismantling stigma and discrimination and treating people differently because they live in social housing, we are talking about addressing the root cause of systems that say on the one hand if you are in private rental, you can expect this standard. On the other, if you are in social housing, you should cop and you should be lumped with and you should accept a lesser standard. We are working to actually make sure that the homes that people are moving into, whether that is Flemington, whether that is North Melbourne, whether that is the new developments we have got in Brighton or in Prahran, they are indistinguishable from the homes that people have as part of the private rental market. That leads to all sorts of really significant improvements through social cohesion and a range of other social and economic participation metrics.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. I met with a community housing provider in Mernda at their lovely property there, which is very nice. For the residents there, they do not see it as there being a difference between who the provider is. I discussed with the provider about how some people say it is sort of a second tier, and they found that quite shocking or offensive because they do fantastic work for the tenants we have there in Mernda. I am so glad to have such a fabulous community housing provider looking after the people in my patch, in such a great spot too. But you have got other commitments under the housing statement under your portfolio, so how are you progressing on those?

Harriet SHING: We are continuing to invest in the homelessness supports, and also again I will go into this inequality. The opposite of pride is shame, and so we are addressing the causes and the impacts of that shame as they relate to where and how people live in all sorts of ways. I am very happy to take you to them should we have another opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We are going to go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon.

Harriet SHING: Hello.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just a couple of questions, I think some of these might be departmental.

Harriet SHING: Yes, of course.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Of the \$5.3 billion earmarked for the Big Housing Build, how much of that has already been spent?

Harriet SHING: It is about 50 per cent, isn't it?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, just on 50 per cent.

Harriet SHING: Yes, just on 50 per cent.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. How much of the Big Housing Build funding has been allocated for the tender process for the first three public housing towers slated for demolition?

Harriet SHING: It is not coming out of that.

Simon NEWPORT: None of the funds for the Big Housing Build are being devoted towards the towers project.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: None of it? So that is being funded separately from the Big Housing Build?

Harriet SHING: There is \$436 million as part of the allocation for the first tranche of the towers development process, and that sits adjacent to the funding from the Commonwealth around the two red bricks.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. And for the tender process itself is there a disaggregation within that figure that you can provide?

Harriet SHING: No, that is built into the \$436 million, isn't it?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes.

Harriet SHING: Yes, and that is again something we are continuing to work on. It is about a pipeline of delivery. Because it is a multi-decade process, not dissimilarly to the Level Crossing Removal Project for example, once we get one system of approach to whether it is demolition or deconstruction or whether it is the process of relocations or renter engagement, that will continue to gather momentum as that work goes on.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. For the first towers that I just mentioned, how much money has been allocated for the relocation of residents where that is occurring?

Harriet SHING: That is part of the business-as-usual work of Homes Victoria, isn't it, that you took us to earlier?

Simon NEWPORT: No. Look, we will probably have to take the exact number on notice. There were allocations for capital contribution, decontamination, demolition and relocation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If that could be provided on notice, that would be great.

Simon NEWPORT: Yes.

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I understand KPMG has been appointed to manage the redevelopment of the public housing towers. How much have they been contracted for? What was that cost?

Simon NEWPORT: At this stage KPMG are being contracted to do the work on the business case – or the investment case I should say. I will get back to you on that number, but they are not running the project. All they are doing is advising on the investment case and supporting us.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. If you could provide that on notice, that would be great. Thank you. Just moving forward, with reference to the 'Investing in a thriving North Richmond' project announced in I think it was the 2022–23 budget due to be completed in the 2024–25 financial year, the 'State Capital Program' details that so far only \$672,000 has been spent out of the \$5.5 million designated, leaving almost \$5 million to be spent in the 2024–25 financial year. Would I be able to just get a breakdown of expenditure for that \$672,000 spent to 30 June 2024?

Harriet SHING: We can take a notice and give you the breakdown, if you would like. It might be simpler than going through it in granular detail now.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: No, that is okay. Just adding on to that, if I could get a breakdown of anticipated expenditure for the \$4.8 million remaining expected to be spent in 2024–25.

Harriet SHING: Yes, we can do that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On page 150 of budget paper 4 the government says –

Harriet SHING: Sorry, Mr Puglielli –

Dannii de KRETSEK: I would say that the biggest achievement last year in the spending was the futsal pitch at the North Richmond estate that has made a lot of children very, very happy and gets used regularly at night, but we will give you a breakdown of the rest of the expenditure.

Harriet SHING: There you go. It has got a futsal pitch included, so that will be part of the list that you are given.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. On page 150 of budget paper 4, as I was just about to say, the government says it has taken \$8.9 million from the cooling public housing towers initiative and it has redirected it to the government's plans for the public housing towers. Could I just confirm for the record which towers are not going to get that air conditioning?

Simon NEWPORT: The three towers – the ones in Flemington and North Melbourne. All other towers are still in the program.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. So just those – the rest of them are getting the air conditioning as per previous?

Simon NEWPORT: Correct. Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On the subject of maintenance more broadly for social housing residents, could I just get an understanding of what the cost savings forecasted for the government are in social housing maintenance in this budget and into the future when the new towers are built?

Simon NEWPORT: We will take that on notice.

Harriet SHING: Yes. That is comparison that again might take a little bit of work in terms of what the overall cost-benefit analysis looks like.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is okay. On notice is –

Harriet SHING: It is not actually set out in the budget paper in terms of that A versus B.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay.

Simon NEWPORT: If you do not mind, the main reason for that is of course that the outputs do not include anything that is funded from operations of Homes Victoria, including rents. It is only consolidated funding that we have received from the government.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure, okay. Thank you. With regard to the housing assistance output, which includes the continuation of the affordable housing rental scheme, in a media release from late February this year, Minister, you stated there were over 300 homes under the scheme so far. Are you able to provide an exact, up-to-date total number?

Dannii de KRETSEK: Currently, there are 303 affordable homes across six sites at the moment, and I can tell you 281 of them are tenanted and 22 people are in the tenancing process right now.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, thank you. I understand the scheme was launched in April 2022 with a goal of at least 2400 homes by June 2027. February was just over a third of the way along the timeline in terms of the June 2027 end date. Given the numbers you have just given to me, do you believe that the Labor government will be able to meet its own target of 2400 homes by 2027?

Harriet SHING: Well, it might not be an opinion rather than a progress-tracking question, if that is okay.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure, yes.

Dannii de KRETSEK: The commitment for 2400 includes affordable homes that will also be delivered through the community housing sector. Procurement on some of those homes is imminent as well and will go through procurement processes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Could you just outline a bit more what those processes are?

Dannii de KRETSEK: Yes, people are tendering, and we evaluate value for money and the locational aspects of those homes in order to make sure they meet Victorians' needs.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair, Minister. Minister, I would like to also talk about the redevelopment of the 44 public housing towers. I know it has been described as Australia's biggest urban regeneration project ever. Budget paper 2, page 40, outlines the intention that there will be an at least 10 per cent uplift in social housing as part of these redevelopment projects, and whilst obviously I know that these existing towers have provided good homes to thousands and thousands of people over a long time, they are increasingly getting out of condition and we do not want people in social housing to be in any worse conditions than any other member of the community, so I can see clearly the benefit of this project. I would just like to know – particularly it was also just discussed with Mr Puglielli, the Flemington and North Melbourne projects – if I can ask about the relocation of the residents from those towers, what progress is being taken and what consultation is being done with those residents?

Harriet SHING: Sure. One of the things that we have worked really hard on is to make sure that people have access to good information around the impact on them of this large-scale multidecade process. When we talk to that investment and that partnership that will take place across all levels of government and indeed will require a lot of work with affected communities, we know that it is this work that continues alongside communities in terms that meet their needs. When the announcement of the housing statement was made last September, and the redevelopment of the public housing towers was announced, we had a very, very immediate process of engagement with people around the work to develop the towers. There was doorknocking, there were pop-up sites, there were information and town hall meetings. There were appointments made with people immediately after the announcement was made and in the months that followed. We do want to make sure that we are continuing to connect people with those relocation teams, and this is, as much as anything, about making sure people can talk to the people from their own communities. We know that we have a really rich multicultural and multifaith community representation across these towers, and again cultural safety and cultural engagement is really important, often in a way that is iterative. There are numerous conversations that take place with tenants about what their options are, what their choices and their aspirations are, and how we can make sure that people can own the decisions that are right for them.

This means, again, having a process that enables them to ask questions and to receive information. It is also about communities being able to take the decisions, often en bloc, around where and how the relocations might work for them. At this point around 98 per cent of renters have met with the relocations team, and 94 per cent of them have submitted an application form to work with them to find the home that is right for them and for their needs. Change is really hard, so again, it is really important that we are embarking upon this process, as Homes Victoria does, as the sector does overall, in a way that is considered, that is empathetic, that is culturally safe and that is consistent. We continue to do that work. Across the tower sites we have had 103 tower renters at those tranche 1 sites who have accepted offers of housing, and 32 of those have move into a home based on their preferences, with several relocating in the neighbourhood.

One of the things I also want to just be really clear about is what is called the right of return. We want people, where they do want to come back to the area from which they have relocated, to be able to do that. That is why when we look at the ground lease model 1 and the work that we have done there, we know that people might take a bit of time to work out where and how they want to move, whether they want to exercise that right of return and whether there are other options that are based on their own changing circumstances – if they have a family, if they have either more kids or they have kids moving out of home, or if they have intergenerational households, and that changes over time. That will change the sorts of homes that people are looking for and the sorts of locations that they want to move to, particularly if they are after something that has a backyard or something that has a balcony. Homes Victoria works very, very comprehensively with people around understanding what their needs are.

This again speaks to the importance of autonomy as we develop this infrastructure build, because as enormous as this is, this pipeline of work across decades, it is about people. When we think about the towers, I cannot think of any life experience or occasions that have not taken place in those towers. They have been home to generations of people. They are a source of enormous pride. There is a lot of love for the towers, a lot of attachment and connection to the towers. But it is also about making sure that we can address affordability and availability, that we can provide people with modern and fit-for-purpose housing that, again, provides that measure of real pride and real connection as our population grows.

When we treble the number of people who will be able to call those tower sites home, it will be with that 10 per cent uplift in social housing, and that is part of what we are doing across the state. Those 44 tower sites are one part of the work we are doing, and then more broadly we are putting social housing into communities everywhere. In many instances it is completely indistinguishable from other developments that are taking place, and that is exactly how it should be. Whether it is worker accommodation, whether it is social housing or whether it is affordable housing, we want to make sure that in every way we are deploying methods of construction, such as modern methods of construction right through to partnering on local content, local build and local workforce, to deliver at the end of the day homes that everybody can be proud of, irrespective of their personal circumstances, their histories, their stories and any source of disadvantage that might have brought them to the social housing sector in the first place.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Just quickly – Mr Puglielli stole my thunder a little bit with this – the high-rise cooling program: outside of what we have just discussed with those Flemington and North Melbourne towers, that program is not being pared back in other towers; is that correct?

Harriet SHING: We are continuing to develop that but also to make sure that we invest in cool places, in opportunities for people to have portable air conditioners. Again, we want people to be comfortable; particularly as we see temperatures change and become higher over time in those towers that is really important to address. Concrete slab construction means the heat goes up and it stays there once those buildings have warmed up.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. Minister and officials, our time for this session has come to an end.

Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is going to take a very short break before beginning its consideration of the equality portfolio at 1:50 pm.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.