

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget estimates 2020–21 (Neville)

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 December 2020

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Ms Lisa Neville, MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary, and

Ms Corri McKenzie, Deputy Secretary, Police, Fines and Crime Prevention, Department of Justice and Community Safety; and

Mr Shane Patton, Chief Commissioner, and

Ms Susan Middleditch, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Regulatory Services and IT and Infrastructure, Victoria Police.

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

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be here today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2020–21 Budget Estimates. Its aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

Please note that witnesses and members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but should replace them afterwards.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

Evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

We welcome Minister Neville, and we welcome the commissioner of police and your officials. Thank you for joining us today. We invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Ms NEVILLE: Good morning, committee, and thank you, Chair. Just in terms of the police budget this year, as you can see, we have got an additional \$393 million in this budget, and that brings the total investment since 2015, our first budget after being re-elected, to \$3.6 billion. So it is the biggest ever investment in Victoria Police's history, which was used and is continuing to be used in a modernisation process—so new equipment, new technology, the biggest uplift in police numbers in Victoria Police's history, and investment in specialist workforces like the special operations group, the gang squad and drug investigations. So, again, really significant changes in terms of numbers, capability and capacity for Victoria Police, and this budget is no different. One of the comments I would make, and I will probably make this later this afternoon in the COVID section, is that I cannot imagine what position Victoria Police would have been in if they had continued to not have investment in new police numbers in being able to respond as they have during the COVID and bushfire periods in 2020.

In terms of this particular budget, there are a couple of significant investments: firstly, investment in countering violent extremism. We have gone through a long process out of the Harper-Lay review about what investments and what projects and programs we needed to put in place. So this is an investment to continue to be able to do that—to be able to respond. Perhaps one of the most significant investments we made a number of years ago was in the Victorian Fixated Threat Assessment Centre. This is a combined service between Victoria Police and forensic mental health services, and it is really focused on those people who particularly get fixated and are at risk of terrorism. I am sure there have been a number of referrals during this COVID period, given the

increasing threat to parliamentarians during this period as well, to look at whether there are significant risks or options for people to escalate their behaviour. So this funding continues that investment in that important service.

There is also funding for the embedded youth outreach program, which is a program that operates in Werribee and Dandenong that brings youth workers and police together in an after-hours service. That has been extremely successful and focused on those young people who are particularly at risk of offending.

Also there is the funding—\$8 million—for the redress and restorative engagement scheme. So this was a recommendation from the VEOHRC report into sexual harassment and discrimination in Victoria Police, over its history. This scheme has had significant interest mainly from women—past and current members of Victoria Police. The demand has been very high. It shows just how significant for some women and members of Victoria Police some of the previous behaviours have been. This scheme has a mix of financial redress for those who suffered particular risks and issues, particularly more significant abuse, through to a restorative engagement process. So overall eligibility for financial payments is running at 95 per cent, which shows you that unfortunately many have been subject to more of the severe abuse and harassment.

The budget also continues investment in road safety. So what we know from the Monash University Accident Research Centre is that one of the best ways and quickest ways to reduce the road toll in Victoria is more speed cameras across our system—no question about it. This budget has brought forward an investment we made last year in road safety camera hours which is ultimately going to see a 75 per cent planned increase in those hours. We have brought it forward by two years, to May of this year. So we are bringing forward the rollout in order to make a really significant and quick impact on the road toll. I know—and I might get to talk about this later—one of the really interesting things that we have seen is a real shift in attitude amongst Victorians in support of road safety cameras playing a big role.

Very quickly—and I hope I get to talk about this as we go through—some of the other investments: we have got remote witness rooms at Victoria Police stations; a new police station planned at Narre Warren and Clyde North; money for some of the coronavirus response that Victoria Police have done; and a significant investment in the next part of the modernisation of Victoria Police—\$329 million. Some of that might sound boring, but these are significant changes for Victoria Police.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and I will pass the call to the Deputy Chair, Mr Richard Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Minister and your department. First question: Minister, can you tell us how much you have spent to date and will need to continue to spend to get six of the 10 booze buses back on the road that you promised back in 2017—these much-needed road safety measures?

Ms NEVILLE: In fact through the great efforts of Assistant Commissioner Libby Murphy and Victoria Police we will not spend any more. In fact the rectification of those booze buses is being done by the companies. They have accepted responsibility for the manufacturer failure that occurred there, so that is a great outcome. My memory is that we will have at least one or two before Christmas back on the road, with the remaining back by May, I think it is—Commissioner?

Chief Comm. PATTON: March.

Ms NEVILLE: March next year. So they have found the fault, they are fixing the fault and they are rolling out now.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So my question to the commissioner: Commissioner, last year, 2019, we saw a huge spike in road deaths coming off a 2018 year that was pretty good; I think 2018 might have been the lowest. Last year ballooned right out again. This year does it concern you, and should it concern everybody, that year to date, with various reports of 60 per cent fewer cars on the roads, our road toll as of last night is higher than what it was in 2018?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Look, we are concerned when there is any death at all and when there is any injury on the road whatsoever, but I can assure you we are absolutely doing everything we can from a policing perspective. As we all know with the coronavirus—I think it was in March—we were required to stop our booze bus operations and our drug bus operations from a health perspective. We have recently started those

back up again. So we did see a decrease in terms of the preliminary breath tests and the drug tests that we would normally make because we could not run those booze buses and drug buses—because of the fact that it was a health risk. We have now started those back up again. We did redeploy our road policing people out onto the roads et cetera and we are doing absolutely everything we can. There is no doubt in terms of the focus of Victoria Police on road safety that we are totally committed to it, and of course we are concerned when we see deaths.

If you compare different years, it is very difficult to compare apples and oranges, and I do not say that flippantly. The reality is there are different environments, different contexts and different volumes of vehicles on the road. You rightly point out that there has been a decrease over this period of time in terms of vehicles on the road, but at the same time because of the fact that there are less cars on the road we have a higher traffic speed that has been occurring when people are out on the network, and because of that we see impacts that are substantial when people collide.

Mr RIORDAN: Just finally, then, the minister said we will have two more booze buses of the six by Christmas. That is next week. Do you believe you are going to have two or more extra booze buses on the road by next week?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Yes, definitely. I think one is due to roll out tomorrow and then one by before Christmas, and the other three are scheduled to roll out by March. So that is really positive news through a recent—

Ms NEVILLE: Can I just say too, it is not like we have not been able to do booze buses regardless.

Mr RIORDAN: No, but in 2017 you said—

Ms NEVILLE: We rescheduled. We re-rostered. We had more people doing it; we had no less. The only reduction in booze bus testing was as a result of COVID.

Mr RIORDAN: And the fact that they did not work.

Ms NEVILLE: No, not at all.

Mr RIORDAN: Well, you just said—

Ms NEVILLE: No, they did not impact on the ability of Victoria Police—

Mr RIORDAN: So are you saying they are going to have no impact when they come in?

Ms NEVILLE: with the current fleet they have. This is to replace the current fleet, so they have a current fleet. With the small ones, what it meant was that they were designed to be able to go onto roads that we previously have not been able to go on.

Mr RIORDAN: Chief Commissioner, in the budget allocation there is \$30.3 million for asset initiatives for Victoria Police enhancements. Will any of this \$30.3 million be spent on additional tasers for frontline officers?

Chief Comm. PATTON: No, that is not funding for tasers.

Mr RIORDAN: With the police association calling for tasers for all frontline officers, would you have liked to see additional tasers for your members?

Chief Comm. PATTON: We have certainly been talking with government about the possibility of getting additional tasers for our members, like we talk to government continually about a whole range of different matters. We are continually seeking to get improvements right across our network. As you are aware, we rolled out the tasers in the country area, in the rural area, because they are an effective solution. As well as that we have our critical incident response team in the metropolitan area who have that coverage through tasers. But that is not included in that funding.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. I will pass the call to Mr Gary Maas, MP.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Minister, thanks, Commissioner, and thanks, team, for your appearance this morning. If I could take you to the public safety initiatives, Minister—I reference budget paper 3, page 104—I was hoping you would be able to outline how those investments in that funding make our community safer.

Ms NEVILLE: Thanks for that question. As I often do, I ran out of time during my presentation, so it is good to have a chance to talk in a little bit more detail around some of the initiatives. I touched before on the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre. This has been a very significant investment. I think there have been now something like 693 referrals that have been made to that centre; 177 total cases have been accepted. Again, just to give you a sense of that, that is people at the very high end of risk to our community, and at the moment FTAC are managing around 24 cases. As I indicated, this is a partnership of specialist police working closely with forensic and mental health experts, and it is about assessing what people's risk level is, do they need a police intervention, do need a CVE intervention or do they need an early mental health intervention. Often that is the case, and we know that where you can do that in an early way, often you can shift some of those risk behaviours. So this budget, as I indicated, continues that funding. We were behind until we funded this I think in the 2016–17 budget. We were one of the few states that did not have something like this, and certainly in terms of the international communities this is a really key fundamental component of their terrorism strategies and those sorts of high-risk individuals with mental health issues.

There is also funding for the embedded youth outreach program. This is a program that is particularly focused on those communities where we have seen higher levels of high-risk, high-harm youth offending, and it is trying to get in a little bit earlier, work with families and work with those young people. They are connected into the multi-agency panel as well, so Dandenong and Werribee both have a multi-agency panel. That is really intensive oversight that then, combined with this program that operates after hours with police and youth workers, is about making sure that we have identified those young people who are most at risk of offending after hours and trying to work with them and their families to prevent it. It has been a really successful program. It started as a pilot and we are continuing the funding in this budget.

I touched a little bit on the restorative engagement and redress scheme. That is \$8 million. As I indicated, that came out of the VEOHRC report. I think the figure I gave was 95 per cent of people are at that high end so are getting financial support, so that means they have been subject to either serious or significant abuse in the workplace. Importantly, it also has a restorative part to it, where they work with Victoria Police on being able to tell their story and work through that. For some they feel it affected their careers and their promotion, so how does Victoria Police respond and deal with that? So it is not just about the financial support to people, but actually an opportunity hopefully to work through some of those issues with Victoria Police, and there is also counselling that is provided to people as part of that program.

There is also significant money—as I said, \$330 million—to continue to further modernise the way Victoria Police works; so how they deal with documents, for example. There is a lot of manual handling, they are spread across different areas, so trying to find past case files and all of that needs to actually have a centralised, digitised system, which I think most organisations would have, but Victoria Police are way behind the times, like they were when they were using fax machines rather than mobile technology. So it is a full package of both service delivery but also how we continue the program of modernising Victoria Police.

Mr MAAS: Terrific, thank you. I might leave it there.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr David Limbrick, MLC.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and team, for appearing today and for your presentation. I would like to touch on the coronavirus response funding that was in slide 5. Maybe if I can direct my question to the commissioner: Victoria Police have had to do some very exceptional work throughout the state of emergency. We have heard in other evidence that the state of emergency will possibly go until the end of this financial year, so there is likely to be a lot more of this type of policing. What sort of things have Victoria Police learned in these very, very exceptional circumstances? I imagine a lot of the things that you have had to do are quite new. What sort of things have been learned and will be done possibly differently for the rest of the financial year until the state of emergency ends?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Are you talking in respect of how we are enforcing the coronavirus, or generally in terms of policing aspects, I suppose?

Mr LIMBRICK: In terms of policing—the public health directions through the state of emergency.

Chief Comm. PATTON: With the public health directions, obviously it fluctuates and the numbers of infringements we issue and the approach we take have fluctuated as the virus has fluctuated and as the chief health officer's directions have fluctuated substantially. One of the things that was not learned but has been reinforced to us is the fragility of confidence of the public if we do not get it right, and we have seen one or two incidents where we have not got it right and we have corrected that. So it is an absolute reinforcement by me and by my senior leaders to make sure that we are saying, 'Where it is appropriate we use discretion', so that we have the trust of the public. It is not just about issuing an infringement, and I have been quite consistent in this, saying it is only when there are deliberate, obvious and blatant breaches we should be enforcing, and where we can, we alter public behaviour by doing what we can in terms of working with them.

The difficulty for policing in this arena is that it is so complex. You have chief health officer directions that change one day. No-one would have ever envisaged we would be enforcing vehicle checkpoints or we would be enforcing stay-at-home directions and those types of things. So for us the critical aspect has been to take very much a commonsense approach, but the vital part of our role is making sure that we stop the spread of that virus by stopping the movement of people, and that has been really sheeted home to our organisation.

What have we learned? I think in the short term and moving forward we have learned that there is a requirement for us to be agile enough to respond to the changes in the chief health officer directions and to make sure that when we are policing, though, we work with the community and that we recognise that people will make honest mistakes. To keep their confidence we use appropriate discretion in those circumstances, but absolutely we enforce where it is appropriate, because there has to be carrot-and-stick approach. If there is no ramification or no consequence for actions, then no-one will adhere to the guidelines.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you very much, Commissioner, for that answer. With regard to these directions—and, as you say, they could change quite frequently; I imagine it must be very hard to police these—what sorts of communications do you get to assist with your policing from the chief health officer and the public health team with regard to, 'Okay, how do we police this in the way that best promotes public health'?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Well, I am a member of the state control team now, and the chief health officer is also member of that state control team, so I am in a position where I can directly ask the chief health officer if I have any issues in terms of any ambiguity of enforcement or anything like that. That is one avenue. But my senior policy staff and the deputy commissioner who is allocated over the COVID operations, they are in virtually daily contact in terms of working with the Department of Health and Human Services and all of the other agencies involved so that we have input into these matters in terms of the viability of enforcement of them and what it is they are actually seeking from it. The way I am trying to explain that to you is we absolutely worked hand in hand with them to understand what it is they are trying to achieve by the restriction of movement, what they are seeking from us, and we generally get an explanation—not generally; we always get an explanation—if there is any ambiguity, and if I am unclear on anything, I just seek the clarity of the chief health officer, and that is inevitably given.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Mr Limbrick. Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, all. Minister, the budget allocates \$10 million to purchase land for new police stations at Narre Warren and Clyde North. Last year's budget had \$68 million for those two stations in contingency. What is the status of that money now?

Ms NEVILLE: That money remains in contingency.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The two stations were committed to in 2018 as election commitments, and it was stated that they would be completed in 2022. Can you guarantee that they will be constructed and operational by 2022?

Ms NEVILLE: We will certainly be working towards that time line. I do not think we will deliver in 2022. We will get close to that. We had hoped that the land would have been potentially part of GAIC given the growth communities, but that is why we have now just provided the funding, so we can move quickly on it. It will just vary how quickly we can find land and then get it out to tender.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, so when you say part of GAIC, the land would have been purchased through a GAIC contribution?

Ms NEVILLE: Yes, that is right.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So there is no land been purchased at this stage?

Ms NEVILLE: No, that is why we have allocated the funding in the budget.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And has any land been identified?

Ms NEVILLE: No, not yet.

Mr D O'BRIEN: If it is not going to be by 2022, what is your estimate now?

Ms NEVILLE: Look, we have just got the money. When I know we have purchased the land I can probably give you an estimate then.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Chief Commissioner, in the budget have you been allocated any funding for upgrades or rebuilds of Broadmeadows, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Prahran, Malvern, Wollert, Hamilton, St Kilda, Clayton, Benalla, Point Cook, Drouin, Coleraine or Rokewood stations?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Off the top of my head, I do not believe we have, no.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Are you happy to take that on notice?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Yes, I will, but I do not believe we have.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Perhaps to confirm then—the only capital funding in the budget is for Narre Warren and Clyde North?

Chief Comm. PATTON: That is my understanding.

Ms NEVILLE: On top of the 47 other rebuilds and refurbishments we have already done.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, the budget allocates funding until June 2021 for the embedded youth outreach program. Will you guarantee that funding for that program will continue beyond this date? There is nothing in the out years.

Ms NEVILLE: We will continue to look at youth offending and make sure that we are putting funding into the right programs. That program is working; it is working well. That is why it has been refunded. But what we have seen around youth offending is that we are getting changes in trends, and we want to make sure that we are funding the right programs.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Continuing on that theme, Chief Commissioner, the budget papers confirm that in 2019–20 there were 912 youth referrals made. Over the same period crime statistics data shows there were more than 30 000 alleged offenders between 10 and 19. Why do only 3 per cent of young offenders get referred?

Chief Comm. PATTON: I cannot give you a detailed answer as to why that is the case. I can just speak generally about the impact and the importance of us dealing with youth offenders. It is an integral part of what I have been sheeting home since I have been in my role as Chief Commissioner. We have appointed an assistant commissioner who has the youth portfolio, Assistant Commissioner Hansen, and he is driving a whole host of reforms right across the youth portfolio. A focus of that is the e-referrals, but not only that—we have taken on board a whole range of different initiatives to look at how we can get increased diversions for youth, how we can keep them out of the justice system and how we can involve them in a whole range of different programs through such things as the multi-agency panels to make sure that they are back at school to reduce recidivist offending.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But in that context, Chief Commissioner, with only 3 per cent being referred, doesn't that show that that is not working?

Chief Comm. PATTON: I do not know whether it reflects that it is not working. What it means is that there are not as many being referred as I would like, and that is why I am saying that we have implemented a whole range of different programs and a whole focus through our youth portfolio and through an assistant commissioner taking primary responsibility. It has been my experience that when we give someone ownership of an issue, an issue of such significance as youth, we then start to get those outcomes that we are trying to seek. So yes, I would like to see more of those referrals for sure, but that is why we are now really ramping up the focus on youth, including the embedded youth outreach program and a range of other areas where we are dealing with youth.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The youth cohort is still the largest group of alleged offenders in the statistics. When can we start to see a reduction in youth crime?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Well, I do not have a crystal ball. All I can tell you is that I am absolutely committed to dealing with youth in terms of (a) holding them to account for the offences they are committing and (b) making sure they are diverted from the justice system and they receive the appropriate supports that they are seeking, the appropriate referrals to those who can help them out, and to make sure that we are doing everything we can to reduce crime.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. Ms Pauline Richards, MP.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and Chief Commissioner, and thanks to the members who have been serving us this year; I am very conscious of that extra effort, work and burden. I would like to take you back to budget paper 3, page 104, on public safety. I am interested in understanding what will be the investment in countering violent extremism and how it will contribute towards public safety.

Ms NEVILLE: Thanks for that question. I know this is probably not appropriate, but I am going to do it anyway. I just want to clarify a couple of things around youth offenders. Over time we continue to have a declining proportion who are youth offenders. We saw a little bit of an increase in the last crime stats, but compared to 10 years ago we continue to decline. And they are not the biggest proportion of every offender at all; in fact it is men in middle age because of family violence. That is not to diminish some of the serious offending we are seeing, but we also see a lot of low-level offending amongst young people as well.

I touched a little bit on this earlier, the extra money for CVE. People may recall that we had done quite an extensive review, or asked Harper and Lay to do an extensive review, that has led to both legislative changes as well as service and policy changes. We do have a committee that involves ministers, experts and Victoria Police in looking at our policy settings around this as well. The CVE program has come out of that, and it is run out of the department of justice. But most of the resources go into the actual programs on the ground.

To give people a sense of where we are in terms of terrorism, certainly it remains at a national level as probable. We have not seen some of the issues that Europe has seen, but certainly through the COVID period we have seen some concerning trends and developments as well. In terms of the major threat, it still remains the Sunni Islamic extremism as our major threat in terms of terrorism, but we are seeing a development of that right-wing extremism developing. And it is probably in a sense one of the harder areas to work with given that it is often lone actors, it can occur out of sight, you do not have the same sort of groups and ability to build intelligence around risk. So this is an area of significant work by Victoria Police and also obviously nationally with ASIO and internationally as well.

We know that as of November this year about 16 per cent of people who have been referred to Victoria Police in terms of CVE were associated with right-wing ideology, so it is still the smaller amount but it is a significant group and a growing group. Victoria Police is in the process of formalising the intervention model around that and how we leverage a range of service providers and different mentors that might play a role in responding to individuals who are at risk of radicalisation in terms of right-wing ideology. Earlier this year in the annual threat assessment that ASIO does, when they released that, they confirmed that we are seeing children as young as 13 being targeted in terms of extremist recruiters and right-wing extremism, and it is a real and growing threat. That is the sort of language you are hearing out of ASIO at the moment, and that is consistent with what you are hearing internationally as well.

That is why we continue this investment. These are significant programs, many of which we often do not talk much about. One of the programs that we have continued in this budget is the Northern Community Support Group. This has been a really important group that has worked with the Muslim communities in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, focusing on education, employment, culturally and religiously appropriate services, identity, social participation. So again it is very much a social cohesion/prevention program, rather than necessarily an intervention program where someone is radicalised. It has had success and that is why it is being funded again. But it will also fund some additional components: a case manager to better support case management of clients, particularly those who are showing some signs of radicalisation; and there is also an investment in disengagement and diversion programs for young people in that community as well.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Minister and Commissioner and your team, for appearing this morning. This question is probably best for Commissioner Patton. It relates to the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, which there is funding in the budget for. With the repeal not being fully in place until 2022, it is obviously going to require trial sites and then the law being applied differently inside and outside the trial sites. Have Victoria Police signed on to the government's scheme?

Chief Comm. PATTON: When you say signed on, that is an interesting question. We certainly support the decriminalisation of drunkenness, and I have said that publicly. The police association have also indicated that as well. The only concerns are—that they have expressed—how do we settle on an operational model and what is the best operational model and how do we work through that, because what on its surface may seem really easy needs to have a lot of things worked through to have a true health model. So, yes, we have signed on, for lack of a better descriptor. It is just now we are working through with government, with the Department of Justice and Community Safety what the best model is to give the most effective safety to those persons who are found intoxicated.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. Great. And just what is that process in terms of developing the scheme?

Chief Comm. PATTON: We are already working and involved with health and with the department of justice so that we can work through and determine how can a model work right across the state, because there are issues, obviously, in terms of accessibility to services—in the country they are not as available as in the city—and to work through whether the one model can actually apply right across country versus metropolitan or whether there may be a need for a variance in a model. So that is why there will be an importance and a need for a trial to be able to determine what is the most effective and indeed the safest model that we come up with in the end.

Ms NEVILLE: It just might be useful; we have also established a task group which involves TPA, the ambulance union and health services to look from that perspective as well. So there are a lot of those discussions going on around what this best model is.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes, great. I guess with a two-year trial period obviously it will be applied to different people in different areas, but will there be any sort of interim measures more broadly? Because if people are still getting locked up for public drunkenness in the next two years, that obviously is a risk. Are there going to be any interim measures put in place more broadly outside of the trial sites?

Chief Comm. PATTON: When you say 'interim measures', we have seen arrests for public drunkenness decline over the last number of years because we are applying discretion and only using that as a last resort in terms of arrests. We are very mindful of outcomes of coronial inquests of recent times, and we continue to make sure that our members—my members—have undergone mandatory training. We continue to upskill them all and to make sure that they are in a position to provide the most safe care they can when we have people in custody. So when you talk of upskilling, by mandating that members must undertake training—which has occurred over the last two years in terms of how they will look after people safely when they are in custody—yes, we have been giving that upskilling.

Ms NEVILLE: And just in terms of the Indigenous community, I know that there is work going on with health and justice around trying to develop some diversion programs, so there are some other options for Victoria Police as well in the meantime.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you. Just on to another issue, one of the issues that has been canvassed quite widely is IBAC's police oversight function and their ability to properly undertake their police oversight function, which is important to them. It has been canvassed that their ability to actually do that is dependent on the funding. Are you concerned about their stated inability to tackle systemic police oversight issues?

Chief Comm. PATTON: It is not for me to talk—I do not understand what funding levels IBAC do or do not have. All I know is that we work very much with them. Commissioner Redlich and I speak regularly. IBAC have significant oversight in relation to a range of issues in terms of policing, and they step in when they deem it appropriate and actually conduct investigations themselves. From what I have seen, they have not been impeded or lacked the capability to be able to do what they do, but as I said, I do not know the inner workings of IBAC other than that they are an integral part of working with us to make sure that we are doing everything we can to ensure we have the right culture and discipline standards.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. Mr Tim Richardson, MP.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. Taking you back, Minister, to public safety, I am just wondering, for the committee's benefit, how does the investment in the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre lead towards better outcomes?

Ms NEVILLE: Thank you, Mr Richardson. I was talking before about when we set it up. In 2017 it commenced, with a \$31 million investment at the time, and it really I suppose came out of—

We had had a number of terrorist threats at the time, and it was one of the identified gaps we felt in terms of our ability to really identify as early as possible people who were at high risk and how we could do that, not just from a policing perspective but how we tapped into other agencies and organisations who might be picking up on risks. So the Parliament is one of those who does that, but it can be schools, it can be other organisations or mental health services who can feed in to that centre any people that they are concerned about, whether they are being radicalised or they have become fixated on individuals or issues to the point where they are concerned about the broader community safety.

I think one of the important things about this model or the centre is that it is absolutely a partnership between Victoria Police and DHHS and some of our best forensic mental health people. They were at the ground floor in developing the service. They are there now in terms of those assessments. Much of this money in fact goes to those DHHS services. Much of that money goes to, you know, access to beds, for example, so that we can make sure that where somebody has been identified as being at risk but with early intervention for mental health services could actually be turned around, shifted, that we have got access immediately to a bed. So a lot of that money goes to that.

As I said earlier, it aligned Victoria with New South Wales, Queensland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and overseas certainly it has been an incredibly successful model. It is one of those things that is hard to measure in the sense that often it is only about inputs rather than outcomes, because it is hard to know what you have prevented, but we are pretty confident that the outcomes are that we have been able to identify early people who may have posed a risk, some of whom will continue to be monitored by Victoria Police, some of whom through treatment have been able to recover and move on with only slight monitoring from their health services.

As I said, we had leading forensic mental health people who were involved in setting it up, we have got specialist police for whom this area is their bread and butter and who know it backwards—understand the risk overseas, understand the risk here. So, look, this has been an incredibly successful investment. As I said, since we have had it, we have had nearly 700 referrals. It may not seem a lot, but these are again the high-end, high-risk group of people.

Mr RICHARDSON: Obviously in your presentation, Minister, you covered off some of the further public safety measures, including more frontline Victoria Police officers. What other work is Victoria doing to tackle issues of public safety?

Ms NEVILLE: Yes. When I started, I talked about the \$3.6 billion investment, and that has gone into so many different elements in uplifting the capability and capacity of Victoria Police. We now have over 2800 additional police since we won the election, a 22 per cent increase, and we are well above the national average in terms of expenditure and well above the national average in terms of EFT per head of population. So thank goodness we did that investment, as I said, given what Victoria Police are being called on to do. Overall there have been 4500 additional police personnel. That includes then the PSOs, the PCOs, the teams that we have funded for drug forensic services, the DNA work—all of that—so significant investment right across the board both in the sworn and unsworn members of Victoria Police.

Some of the really important investments during that time have been the gang crime squad, which funded 30 new specialist officers. We have got three new specialist teams, which include two new illicit firearms teams. We have given powers—and people will recall this—the firearm prohibition orders, so warrantless search powers. Just out of interest, 730 firearm prohibition orders have been issued since that legislation came into effect. We have got new drive-by shooting laws. We established a statewide specialist forensic drug intelligence capability program—so very extensive investment and outcomes there.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Bridget Vallence, MP.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you very much, Chair. Chief Commissioner, we will just go back to what we were discussing before about the booze buses. There was \$322 000 reported to investigate the failures and faults of the booze buses. Will that full amount be recouped, or will the taxpayer be footing that bill?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Well, on what I have been briefed, we are not being charged any moneys at all and the reality is this is being funded by the persons who developed the bus. So they are remediating it and it is not at a cost to Victoria Police.

Ms VALLENCE: So no spend at all to Victoria Police to date on investigating and remediating?

Chief Comm. PATTON: No, that is what I have been briefed—that we are not being charged anything at all and that they are going to foot the bill in effect.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. All right. Is it possible to go and check that and confirm that on notice?

Chief Comm. PATTON: Yes, for sure.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. Chief Commissioner, the 2020–21 budget confirms that the proportion of property crimes against the person resolved within 30 days has dropped significantly and below last year and benchmark levels. Obviously we have gone through a challenging time with COVID, but do you agree that had we not had that sustained period of lockdown with the second wave more crimes would have been resolved in a timely manner?

Chief Comm. PATTON: No, it is difficult to say. I mean, the lockdown has probably impeded some of those investigations of those crimes as well because it stopped attendance at crime scenes to a degree, unless they were really serious. Every crime is serious, but for those that are not major crimes there may well have been a situation where we cannot go out and take a statement from someone straightaway, we cannot get access to a range of services that we need or we do not get bank documents that we need, so there is a whole range of things, as everyone here would be well aware, that have been impacted by COVID and caused delays. Certainly the whole coronavirus pandemic has contributed substantially to delays in the solving of those crimes. Additionally, we reallocated a lot of police to a lot of other functions that they normally would not be doing, so there is some impact on those lower level crimes.

Ms VALLENCE: So a resourcing issue, then, if you are redirecting people through COVID to being able to solve those crimes?

Chief Comm. PATTON: As I said, we have redirected them to a community safety priority. So some of those lower level crimes—a theft, a very minor theft or a very minor deception, and that is not to belittle those crimes, because any crime is important to everybody, but we prioritise. I do not step back or resile from the fact that I have prioritised putting my police officers where they should be to make communities safe, and if that means some of those low-level crimes are going to take a little bit longer to solve, that is where we are at.

Ms VALLENCE: Minister, the proportion of the community, in terms of their confidence level in the police, is well under the 2020–21 target and now at its lowest reported level in a decade. Has your government—you know, in terms of the lockdown and the tone and the enforcement—would you say that that has impacted and exacerbated the confidence that Victorians have in police?

Ms NEVILLE: I do not, actually. My experience in talking to police officers and PSOs who have done a lot of this work—I actually think it increased it in lots of ways. We have never seen so many police I think out on patrol and out on the streets, and that is what people have been wanting for a long time—to see that. In fact one of the central features of the EBA we did with the TPA—one of the features of the service delivery model that the new commissioner is talking about—is how we have more police out on the beat and on patrols. I think what we learnt, going back to the earlier question from Mr Limbrick, was that people like it. They like the engagement, they like talking to their local police and they like them on patrols. In fact most of that is at the smaller end of Victoria Police’s numbers that they had out. It was really post July that we then saw increasing numbers. I think there are probably some other issues that go to those issues. I think obviously the royal commission has been a big feature of that. I think the two things that have been amazing this year are the evacuations police did at the bushfires and their COVID response. I think the community support police strongly for those.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Nina Taylor, MLC.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you, Minister, Chief Commissioner and department officials. Minister, you touched a little bit earlier on road safety, so if I may refer you to budget paper 3, page 104, and the investments into road safety, can you outline how these investments contribute to less trauma on our roads?

Ms NEVILLE: Yes. Thank you for that question. I think it gives me a chance to follow on from some comments that the Chief Commissioner made in relation to this as well. Despite the fact that it has been an incredibly difficult year for everyone but also for police in terms of how they undertake policing—so not being able to do booze buses, given saliva and all those issues at the time and the advice from the chief health officer—what did that mean for Victoria Police and road safety? Well, it meant that they just worked differently. They worked differently. They had more police out on patrols doing road safety checks. That way there was a presence on the roads. Again, as I mentioned before, the fact that we have seen so many police over this period has been a real positive in terms of general public safety—the new crime stats come out tomorrow, so we will see what they look like—as well as on the roads.

But, you know, we also saw that even though we had traffic volumes decrease really significantly, particularly with the stage 4 restrictions, we also had lots of people detected for speeding and speeding well above. So people saw it as an opportunity to not just speed a little bit but speed a lot. And of course because there were not many people around, Victoria Police were also very successful at being able to detect some of that. I think with our red-light cameras we also saw an increase as people thought that they could go through a red light—that apparently cameras were not working during COVID, but they were. So all those measures continued.

But as I said before, there are two things that MUARC suggested—which is the Monash University Accident Research Centre. They said that in terms of road toll, one is speed cameras, and that is why this budget has such a significant uplift in the speed camera program, bringing it forward—75 per cent increase by May of next year. We will see quick and early benefits from that, which is great. The other area is drug testing. We know that drugs remain a really significant risk on our roads, and unfortunately there are huge detection rates as well in terms of drug use amongst drivers. It is a contributor to death; there is no question about that. I know some people might suggest that certain drugs do not impact; they do, and unfortunately the death toll shows us that.

The budget also includes funding to continue the drug testing at 150 000. But we are also doing currently some trials—or Victoria Police are—around issuing infringements on the spot, which means people lose their licence much more quickly. It is quite a laborious process around drug testing, both in terms of the cost compared to

blood and alcohol testing but also in terms of the time. The way that the legislation is currently established, each test has to get sent off to forensic services to be tested and to confirm that there are drugs in your system before you lose your licence, and often that can be up to three months. That means we have potentially got dangerous drivers on the roads, so this trial that we are doing is an attempt to bring that forward in order to be able to get people who have drugs in their system off our roads much more quickly. That investment is really important, and we are continuing to look at opportunities to streamline that process in relation to drug testing so that we can uplift even further in terms of that drug testing going forward.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, and on that topic—I have only got a few seconds—how is the budget ensuring there is a greater level of enforcement with the drug driving? So just continuing—

Ms NEVILLE: Yes, so I suppose it is a little bit about what I just spoke about. So it would be both the drug testing, keeping it at 150 000, and also looking at the pilot that Victoria Police are doing now about issuing infringements on the spot—people losing their licence much more quickly—as well as the other work we are looking at about how else we can actually streamline and fast-track, both to bring down the cost of each drug test but also to be able to do more of them, more quickly. The more we do, the greater the deterrent it is that people will have drugs in their system, which is what has happened with alcohol.

Ms TAYLOR: Excellent.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time we have available for consideration of the police portfolio. We thank you very much for appearing before the committee today, and you as well, Commissioner. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request. The committee will now take a short break before resuming consideration with you of the emergency services portfolio. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.