

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2015–16

Melbourne — 12 May 2015

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Witnesses

Mr Wade Noonan, Minister for Police,

Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary,

Ms Marisa De Cicco, Deputy Secretary, Criminal Justice, Department of Justice and Regulation; and
Acting Chief Commissioner Tim Cartwright,

Mr Tony Bates, Executive Director, Business Services, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2015–16 budget estimates. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I welcome to the hearing the Honourable Wade Noonan, Minister for Police and Minister for Corrections; Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation; Mr Tim Cartwright, Acting Chief Commissioner of Police; Mr Tony Bates, Executive Director, Business Services, Victoria Police; and Ms Marisa De Cicco, Deputy Secretary, Criminal Justice, Department of Justice and Regulation.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

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

Departmental officers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media are to observe the following guidelines: cameras must remain focused only on the person speaking; operators must not pan the public gallery, the committee or witnesses; and filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

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

Mr NOONAN — Thanks very much, Chair, and I am delighted to be able to present a brief presentation just on the high-level, headline features of the budget.

Visual presentation.

Mr NOONAN — To go to the first, in terms of policing, you will note that the 2015–16 state budget has provided Victoria Police with a budget of \$2.51 billion output cost for police services. There is also \$44 million in new asset funding, with an estimated total asset expenditure in 2015–16 of \$137.5 million. The budget also provides output funding of \$259.5 million for infringements and enhancing community safety and crime prevention.

The next slide shows a summary of budget commitments. There is \$148.6 million to recruit 400 custody officers to guard prisoners at police stations, including \$10 million in asset funding. This will free up 400 officers in various locations to return to frontline policing duties. There is \$35.4 million to upgrade the regional police radio system from the outdated analog network to a secure encrypted digital network, and there is a net additional \$11.5 million in this budget for that initiative. There is additional funding of \$7.8 million for 15 sworn police to be located on the Bellarine and in Geelong. This will subsequently provide longer opening hours at a number of stations, including Drysdale, Portarlington and Queenscliff. There is also \$50 million for the Homesafe trial to operate trains, trams and buses through the night on Fridays and Saturdays, starting on New Year's Eve. There is \$4.5 million for additional forensic staff to crack down on clandestine drug labs as part of the *Ice Action Plan* announced by the government, and there is funding through the TAC of \$17.7 million to purchase new drug and booze buses and increase drug tests. There is also \$15 million for a new police station at Mernda.

The next slide has some very high level detail on the police custody officers — as I indicated, there is funding set aside for that. The acting chief commissioner will recruit and train the 400 custody officers to supervise people being held in police cells. The recruitment and training of these officers will commence as soon as possible in the 2015–16 financial year. Custody officers will supervise prisoners at police stations with an initial deployment to a number of sites, including Sunshine, Dandenong, Heidelberg, Ballarat, Geelong and

Broadmeadows and then a progressive rollout beyond those stations. Victoria Police is currently developing an implementation and deployment model.

Moving on to police radio upgrades: as I noted, there is an additional \$11.5 million in funds over four years to upgrade the outdated analog regional police radio system to a secure network. A further \$23.8 million for new radios will be sourced primarily from the retirement of the legacy analog service. Once Victoria Police switches over the analog system to the digital system, the existing funding offsets total cost. The new system will include in-car mobile portable radios operating on a secure network, and it is expected that what we will see is the progressive rollout of this beginning in July, with the digital radios phased in from January 2017.

The next slide is on Homesafe: the government has provided \$50 million to trial Homesafe. This was an election commitment. Very clearly the \$50 million will also help fund transport security to be delivered through a mix of PSOs and police. The operational model is currently being finalised by Victoria Police and Public Transport Victoria.

The next slide: in terms of drugs and ice, members will note the government has announced a \$45.5 million *Ice Action Plan* focusing on some priority initiatives to reduce the supply, demand and of course harm of a drug that is ruining lives. New funding of \$4.5 million as part of that plan will enable Victoria Police to recruit and train additional forensics officers and intelligence analysts to increase their capacity to drug profile and gather intelligence. The *Ice Action Plan* also fulfils a commitment to provide, in this case, \$17.7 million for new drug and booze buses and conduct 100 000 drug tests every year over the next two years, obviously to improve road safety.

In terms of the Bellarine and Geelong package, it speaks for itself: \$7.8 million, 15 new sworn staff and a capacity to extend coverage, patrolling and the like across Geelong and the Bellarine.

The next slide on the Mernda police station — again, a fulfilment of a government commitment: the government has very much listened to Victoria Police and the community and committed \$15 million to build a new station in the growing areas of Mernda and Doreen. That funding will support the purchase of land and the construction of a police station in Mernda.

Finally, the last slide: there are some other initiatives there. Crime prevention: I have asked the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice to lead a review of the Victorian government's approach to crime prevention programs. He has started that work, and that will be due back to me at the end of September. Pending the review, the government has also allocated \$5.8 million to continue grants programs to support community-led crime prevention initiatives.

The government has also committed funding to develop a new multidisciplinary centre at Wyndham. The new centre will provide for the co-location of Victoria Police's sexual offences and child abuse investigation team, child protection workers and centres for sexual assault counsellors to provide an integrated multi-agency response to sexual assault and child sexual abuse. There is also \$1.2 million for the police component of the assessment and referral court list. There are also, as part of our road safety program, significant resources devoted to our road safety camera program, including upgrades and enhancements of mobile cameras.

In conclusion, I am very proud of the commitments the government has made in relation to our first budget. We very much thank the dedicated work of our police men and women. We suspect very strongly that this budget will assist them in their work.

The CHAIR — I refer to pages 275–6 of budget paper 3. I note the output costs for enhancing community safety have increased this year. Can you advise the committee of what programs you have for crime prevention?

Mr NOONAN — I think it is important to note that, at least from a statistical point of view, crime has been going up each and every year for a number of years. So what we view by way of a crime prevention program can be viewed as a whole-of-government activity. The Victorian government is seeking very strongly to tackle the root causes of crime, including — I know you will have the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, Fiona Richardson, along to speak to you — \$40 million for the Royal Commission into Family Violence, a very important investment from the government, and a \$45 million *Ice Action Plan*. I know you had the Minister for Education here this morning. I think it is important that we acknowledge the important role of education and the TAFE system as well as other areas, such as appropriate housing, as keys in terms of crime prevention as well.

There are many ways you can approach crime prevention, but I think it is worth pointing out that the community plays a very important role in terms of crime prevention. There have been a number of programs that have been delivered, with great success. What we would seek to do by way of our own work in this space is that, through the department of justice, we will lead a review in terms of that work. If we can do better, we want to do better. In the interim, as I stated from the outset, what we have set aside and announced is \$5.8 million to continue grant program funding into a number of areas, such as graffiti prevention grants, Community Safety Fund grants and Public Safety Infrastructure Fund grants. The government has allocated some funding for new place-based grants as well.

These are all grants which are really very much targeted around a strong focus on communities with high rates of crime and disadvantage. Our work will be ongoing. I have not spoken about the work that Victoria Police does in this space, but obviously the work they do in terms of their proactive activities is really very, very important work in terms of crime prevention overall. That is just to give you a bit of a taste of the sort of work that we are doing in the area of crime prevention.

Mr MORRIS — Thank you, Minister, for attending this afternoon. Welcome again to PAEC. I think this is your first experience at the table.

Mr NOONAN — I am used to sitting on your side, David.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, could I refer you to the 2015–16 budget overview, page 25, in particular the issue of police resources, and also to the Victoria Police directive of 7 May, which no doubt you are familiar with. The directive was to active frontline police members in response to the newly assessed increased terrorist threat levels. That directive requires members to work at least two up — no single patrols — and of course the wearing of protective vests as well. The critical issue for me is the need to work two up. Given the budget we have before us, and indeed the forward estimates, provides no funding for additional police or for PSOs, nor indeed funding even to keep pace with population growth, can you confirm for the committee that effectively as a result of this directive hundreds of additional first responders will be required to maintain current service levels, and will you provide funding to support what I think is an entirely appropriate operational decision?

Mr NOONAN — Thanks for your question, David; it is an important one. I will perhaps have the acting chief commissioner step you through some of those security aspects, which I think are important. I do not agree with the premise of your question, and that is not with any level of disrespect. But the 400 custody officers who are banked in this budget are very clearly about returning police to the front line. I have visited many police stations, both in opposition and in government, where the number of sworn police used around the clock essentially to supervise prisoners in their care is enormous. No station that I have been to has indicated to me that they believe that is a good use of a resource. I can understand how you might seek to shape this as a budget that does not provide any additional police. That is just simply wrong, because as the custody officers roll out those highly trained police will simply be able to return to proactive frontline first responder duties.

In addition to that, there are additional police set aside for the Bellarine and Geelong areas — new police that have been found over and above the commitment of the 400 custody officers. But if you go back, there are multiple reports, including from the OPI and others, which state very clearly that the issue of the management of individuals in cells is a significant drain on police resources. To train these new custody officers and have them placed in police stations, working very closely with the acting chief commissioner, is about ensuring that police are available to perform those things they are trained to do.

In relation to the issue of the safety of police, obviously what we have seen in recent times is a very serious situation for Victoria Police, and no-one should underestimate the sorts of things that have been publicly reported in relation to the direct threats that police are experiencing. I think what we have to do is simply draw breath at this point and acknowledge that the safety of our police should be our first priority in terms of being able to keep the community safe by extension. To that end I might ask the acting chief commissioner to make some comments about the arrangements that have just been put in place, particularly in line with the increased levels of alert for police across Australia.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. The member has asked a question in relation to the instruction on 7 May, and I would like to give that some context if I can. We actually conducted a review of single-officer patrols and single-officer work some 12 months ago, which made

a series of recommendations which we considered aspirational, to eliminate single-officer patrols and single-officer police station service over the coming years. At that stage we did not envisage the change in environment which we have seen. We had been developing this instruction for some months. You will note in there that there are provisions for a number of exceptions around non-frontline, non-core response duties. We actually include other things like the wearing of operational equipment — vests, carrying of firearms and equipment. We were in a position where we could have continued to refine the instruction and put something out in a perfect form, but given recent events, particularly around Anzac Day, we made the call to put the instruction out as it is and, as you note, the instruction also notes that it is an interim arrangement — six weeks. One of the concerns I have is how we ensure a proper balance between continuing service delivery and the safety of my members.

As the minister points out, 400 officers will relieve us of those custody duties. That will be a great relief. There are a number of other strategies that we will look at to ensure we balance appropriately those custody services. I do not want to foreshadow changes, but I anticipate that we will be fining up that instruction over the coming weeks.

Mr MORRIS — I thank the minister and the acting chief commissioner for that advice. Can I say that I am sure all members around the table and all members of Parliament support the need to make sure our officers are protected and deployed appropriately. Certainly there is no argument on that point from us.

Minister, by way of a supplementary, it appears to me — and by all means correct me if I am wrong — that activities such as single-officer motorcycle patrols and single members undertaking random breath tests, for example, are now under the current arrangements no longer possible. Can I ask you what advice you have received about the impact of this effective policy decision not to up the numbers?

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, David. I appreciate the sensitivity in terms of the way you are asking the question too. I sought to take advice from the acting chief commissioner on this as recently as late last week. Of course the advice, as you are hearing from the acting chief commissioner today, is that these are interim arrangements which police will test and monitor very closely. In terms of the practices, if you like — and again the acting chief commissioner will correct me if I am wrong — across Australia there has been an increase in the level of alert for police, in January. Obviously police have been changing their practices in line with that.

The advice of the acting chief commissioner to me last week was that his view was that there would be limited impacts in relation to the most recent advice, but again, the advice to me and to the government is that they will monitor that very closely, they will test it and, if necessary, make modifications thereafter. The acting chief commissioner might want to supplement that, but that is the advice that came to us late last week.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thank you, Chair. I would like to supplement the minister's comments. The issue of solo motorcycles is one that is particularly sensitive for us and has been for many years. Not just solo motorcycle riders but technically highway patrol members work one up. We have been trying to encourage them for a long time to work two up at high-risk times and locations, particularly after dark. Typically those solos, those motorcycle riders, will come off the motorcycles into cars, and we are encouraging them to work two up. We have been doing that for some time. We are looking at options now of having the highway patrol members on motorbikes working two up, but, as the minister foreshadowed, we need to assess what the impact is and what strategies we have in place so we can appropriately strike a balance between service delivery to the community and protection of the members working on the ground.

Mr MORRIS — Chair, can I take a gentle point of order about the form of address used to members of the committee?

The CHAIR — Of course. If ministers could refer to members of the committee by their proper title, as opposed to their first name, that would be appreciated.

Mr NOONAN — Will do, Deputy Chair and Chair.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you, Minister. Regarding the custody officers you have mentioned — the 400 custody officers — I am very interested in that particular issue from two points of view. One is that you say there are 400 to free up police so that police who are currently doing that will be able to do their duties as

trained members of the police. My question is about the training of the custody officers. What sort of training will they have to do that, to carry out that particular function, and how many police stations will that involve?

Mr NOONAN — Thank you, Ms Pennicuik, for your question. I have recently made a visit out to the police academy to discuss the preparation for the introduction of custody officers. Again, they are a new classification. They will be employed directly by the chief commissioner, which is advantageous in many respects in terms of the training and preparation of their deployment. There is a working group that has been established already inside Victoria Police, which among others involves corrections to support the preparation or training, given that there could be some synergies, if you like, between the work of a custody officer and those who are already managing people in our correctional facilities. Care has been taken in order to prepare the particular training program. Understanding that there are 400 to take through this particular course, I would say that I think the police academy is well placed to undertake this particular training, having visited it and seen its physical set-up. I think they are looking forward to that. The sorts of details you would expect Victoria Police will resolve is how long the program is for — how many weeks, for example, or how big the intakes are in terms of the training programs. I have confidence that they are already setting their minds to that work.

In relation to the second part of your question in terms of where custody officers will go, there are a number of different classifications in terms of police stations, and the priority for custody officers is to go to what they refer to as category A police stations, which are gazetted. They are stations where individuals could be held for up to 14 days. In the case of Mildura I think it is up to 30 days. It is overnight in some cases. So they will be the priority in terms of custody officers. We are working with the police very closely in terms of ensuring that we get a massive benefit, if you like, of the skills that a custody officer can provide, and obviously we will need to pass legislation, which we will prepare for the Parliament in the second half of this year. That is a new classification. These people will be a new classification under the Victoria Police Act. The priority will be about 22 police stations. In terms of their classification they are the sorts of stations where people may be held not for hours but for days in some cases. I hope that provides you with some information.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you for that, Minister. My follow-up question is: during the previous Parliament you would be aware that there were a lot of concerns raised about overcrowding in police cells. I wonder whether 400 custody officers are going to do anything about overcrowding in police cells. What does the government have in place to actually reduce the number of people being held in police cells?

Mr NOONAN — Yes, it was a very big problem. It was a very, very big problem, and it was not lost on the corrections area of my responsibilities. I think at one point the number of people held in police cells was well above 300. I can say that in more recent times management through a good working relationship between the courts, corrections, Victoria Police and others has seen the number of people being held in police cells reduced to less than 150. That seems to be pretty steady, or at least it has been since the change of government. There has been additional capacity added to the corrections system, obviously, in order to provide for a situation where you do not essentially have those police cells operating at absolute capacity.

Having said that, the sorts of individuals who are held in cells can be fairly complex, and therefore whilst there may be only a certain number of people held in those cells, it needs to be understood and accepted that sometimes those individuals need to be kept on their own, for example, and that can be reasonably resource intensive from a staffing point of view. To go to your question, we have not seen the sorts of numbers that previously were raising concerns all over town.

Ms WARD — Good afternoon, Minister. Thank you for the answers that you have given regarding custody officers. If I can ask you to turn to page 83 of budget paper 3, I note that the program to establish a custody office of Victoria over four years will be 148.8 million, which is a significant sum. Can you please explain to us the purposes of this program in more detail?

Mr NOONAN — Thank you, Ms Ward, for your question. I have spent a little bit of time now talking about custody officers, so I expect you will all be experts by the end of this hearing in terms of custody officers.

Ms WARD — We hope so.

Mr NOONAN — I would say, by way of explanation — and this goes to Ms Pennicuik's point — that what we have seen historically is that the issue of the management of police cells has been raised fairly regularly in

the media, and there have been some concerns about the drain on police resourcing as a result of that media coverage.

In terms of Labor's policy development process from opposition, we did give some considerable thought to how we could approach this challenge, if you like. In opposition I was able to talk to police and talk to the Police Association about this as an idea, and obviously it was met with a fairly positive response. In terms of formulating the policy from opposition, it is with great pleasure that we now get an opportunity to put that policy into action and fund it in line with our expectations around funding it, which are important, and obviously in doing that allowing Victoria Police, through the deployment of the custody officers, to return their well-trained officers who have been utilised in this regard back to the community. As the Premier often puts it, rather than babysitting crooks they will be out there catching crooks, which is, I think, what the community would expect.

I think it is important to touch on the response that has come from the Police Association in relation to this particular issue. In their media release on the day that the budget was handed down they made the statement:

For decades, we've been saying that police officers should be freed from 'babysitting' prisoners in police cells in order to do the police work their communities expect of them, like providing proactive street patrols. We're delighted that this 'chestnut' issue will soon be fixed.

That is good news. It means we have got to do the work now — —

Mr MORRIS — Four hundred is a long way from the 1880 they wanted, though.

Ms WARD — Sorry; I did not have a supplementary question. I was still listening to the answer.

Mr NOONAN — We are very pleased to put this policy now in place, and we will work very closely with Victoria Police to make sure we get best utilisation of this resource.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Thank you, Minister. My question is relating to employee expenses — budget paper 5, page 117, if you would like a page. Can you outline the wages policy of the government and how this will relate to the Victoria Police EBA negotiations later this year?

Mr NOONAN — I thank Mr O'Brien for his question. Obviously the current Victoria Police EBA expires on 30 November 2015, so negotiations will commence very shortly between Victoria Police and the Police Association for that new EBA. I understand that that will formally commence later this month. As you probably heard on Friday when the Treasurer was here, the government's approach in relation to wages in the public sector is to provide a 2.5 per cent base, if you like, and then an additional 0.5 per cent for improved service delivery. Where that will get to is a matter between Victoria Police and the Police Association in terms of those negotiations. You will note that the budget for Victoria Police that the government has provided has an increase of 3.2 per cent overall. I might ask, if you are okay with it, for the acting chief commissioner to provide some more details.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Sorry; I just missed the last bit of what you said. You said the budget provided a 3.2 per cent increase.

Mr NOONAN — In the global operating budget for Victoria Police the government has provided an increase in terms of its budget, and as you would appreciate, a significant part of the Victoria Police budget goes in wages. The acting chief commissioner might want to make some further remarks.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to respond. I will supplement this by saying that we have not commenced formal negotiations with TPA as yet. The requirements are that we commence those negotiations by 1 June. TPA has given us an initial log of claims around what it is they would hope to gain out of the EBA. We are still working on our own strategy and approach and the key things that we would want delivered, but I could foreshadow that one of the opportunities for us is in maintaining the flexibility for the office of the chief commissioner to allocate resources according to shifting demands. That is no secret to us or the association. The initial discussions we have had with the association — and we have had quite a few initial discussions — have been positive. I think it is the aim of both sides to produce an outcome which is satisfactory for the membership and for the community, and to do so in a way which does not separate the association from the senior executive in terms of supporting the front line.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, you said formal negotiations would begin next month. Have you met with the Police Association yet on the EBA? If so, on what dates and who from your office was present?

Mr NOONAN — In short, I have met with the Police Association but not to discuss the EBA. The EBA is a process that will be undertaken between Victoria Police and the Police Association. I have met with the Police Association on a number of occasions around a range of matters including, for example, custody officers, police radios in country Victoria and those sorts of issues.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — But the EBA did not come up at all.

Mr NOONAN — No. It is not appropriate for me to be doing the job of the acting chief commissioner and his people.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — I thank the minister for his presentation earlier. I would like to just compliment the government on the Wyndham multidisciplinary centre, which will be based in my area of Western Metropolitan, which is an impressive way forward. I would like to refer to budget paper 3, page 90, where it notes that Mernda has been allocated \$15 million for a new police station to service the areas of Mernda and Doreen. This is commendable and obviously well needed.

I would like to draw your attention to Wyndham. Wyndham is the fastest growing area in the state, with an estimated 5 to 6 per cent annual growth rate. One area within Wyndham which has experienced and is continuing to experience particularly high growth is Point Cook. There is no police station in this area, and the nearest station is in Werribee, which from all reports is quite stretched to its limit already. Given that the best predictor for police resources is simple population growth, when can the people of Point Cook expect a police station to be built in their area?

Mr NOONAN — I thank you for the question. In fact I was out at Wyndham North the other day. Regarding the issue of police resourcing, I hear the argument about population growth, but I make the observation, if you like, that we do not lift our teacher numbers or our nursing numbers simply around population growth as a simple metric. I think what we have to do is be more responsive, I suppose, to the new generation of community safety challenges that emerge. That is not to suggest for a moment that there is not a need to respond to growth, and that is in part why Mernda police station, as you correctly identified in the budget, does appear.

What I would say to you very clearly is that we have a number of budgets from this point forward — a second, a third and a fourth — and obviously what you do as part of that process is you take the opportunity to take the best advice you can from Victoria Police and from your department and determine the best allocation of resources with the advice that they give you. Areas such as the one you have identified in terms of Point Cook and others that will no doubt be raised, we do have a level of flexibility going forward in terms of our priorities, and I will obviously be keen to take advice from both Victoria Police and the department in relation to future requirements. They include asset and obviously output requirements that will be budgeted through future budgets. But I think by way of a response that is what I can give you at this point.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — In your answer you mentioned that you had been to Wyndham North recently, so you would be aware that it is operational 16 hours a day. Can you give me any feedback on whether that will be upgraded?

Mr NOONAN — What I might do is ask the acting chief commissioner to make some comments generally about police station operating hours and the like. You would probably be aware that issues around operational matters such as police station hours fall to Victoria Police, but I understand that your community want some clarity in relation to that, and the acting chief commissioner might be able to provide that clarity.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — In relation to Wyndham North, my understanding — and I would need to check my facts — is that the front counter service is 16 hours a day but in fact a divisional van runs out of there on night shift. I can take that on notice, but that is my understanding. I have some sympathy particularly for Wyndham. I was a superintendent for that area, assistant commissioner for that area and deputy commissioner responsible for that area. Recently we reallocated 10 staff from a central area down to Wyndham police station, largely in reflection of the additional demands that area is experiencing. As you know, Laverton itself has a police station which is a small facility. It does supplement the services to Point Cook and Wyndham.

The other thing I note is that Wyndham will be one of the police stations that will benefit from the custody officer injection, so I would expect to see some more resources freed up in that way.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Welcome, Minister. This is a slightly related segue. My question is about the Geelong and Bellarine community safety packages. They are listed on page 83 of BP3, ‘Output initiatives’, with a commitment of 7.8 million. I have read a bit of the blurb in the budget papers, but I want to get a sense of what was the driver behind that and what the expected outcome will be for that commitment over the forward estimates.

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, Mr Dimopoulos, for that question. It is a very important response to some challenges that we have seen in Geelong and the Bellarine. There was last year a change in the service model in relation to that area — on the Bellarine that is — and the community were concerned about that. I would add to that that there have been some significant challenges in relation to crime in Geelong. I have made a number of visits down there in the time I have been the member and minister with this portfolio responsibility.

There was a very disturbing incident in the Geelong mall, which probably triggered a bit of this, involving a teenage girl assaulting another one, and it was captured and placed on social media. What it did was it drove a level of activity in that community by way of a requirement for response, if you like. I must admit that the work that was undertaken subsequently by the G21 justice forum — with the Department of Justice involved, a number of representative groups down in Geelong, council, the Committee for Geelong, business representatives and obviously Victoria Police playing an important role — which came together and sought to address that particular issue and came up with a response, which has been partially supported with some crime prevention funding. Beyond that I think people who follow these issues fairly closely will understand that Geelong has had a fairly challenging fight emerging around the issue of ice, and there has been a fairly substantial community response to that issue as well.

If I was to take you to the crime statistics that have emerged out of the last three or four years in Geelong, we have seen some significant spikes in a range of areas such as justice procedures, crimes against the person and drug offences. Working closely in the lead-up to the budget with Victoria Police we have been able to structure such a package that we will provide additional resources into that broader area. The acting chief commissioner will be responsible in relation to the deployment of those resources, but we would expect to see greater resourcing in the Drysdale, Portarlington, Queenscliff police stations, the Bellarine area in terms of proactive patrolling and some greater capacity in terms of tackling crime in the community in Geelong as well. I think what we will also see out of this is an opportunity to look at some crime prevention strategies on the Bellarine out of our experience with Geelong, which will be community led. A pretty good package there and I think one that has been well received by that community.

Mr T. SMITH — Welcome, Minister. I refer you to the 2015–16 budget overview at page 25 in relation to police resources. As you would be aware, Victoria’s population is growing annually at 102 000 or thereabouts. To keep up with that extraordinary growth we will obviously need sufficient police resources. Do you agree with the former member for Burwood and your chief of staff, Mr Stensholt, who tabled a petition in the Legislative Assembly in March 2009 calling for funding for the urgent recruitment of an additional 3000 police to secure the safety of the Victorian community?

Ms SHING — Point of order, Chair: I am just wondering what relevance a comment from a former member of Parliament has to this year’s budget papers.

Mr T. SMITH — With respect, Ms Shing, it is his chief of staff.

Ms SHING — I am not talking about his chief of staff. I am asking what relevance a comment from 2007 has — —

Mr T. SMITH — Through the Chair, the former member for Burwood, the minister’s current chief of staff, called for 3000 additional police in 2009. I would have thought that was highly relevant to this discussion.

Ms SHING — Through the Chair, should we be asking what the H. R. Nicholls Society thinks about the TPA’s claim in relation to enterprise negotiations?

Ms WARD — On the point of order, I just want clarification on your question and whether you are referring particularly to comments made by Mr Stensholt or you are actually referring to the budget papers.

Mr T. SMITH — They are interrelated. One comment was relating to police numbers and the budget overview is relating to police resourcing, so I would have imagined that there is a very strong link between both issues. Mr Pearson, this is becoming semantic. This is a perfectly legitimate question.

Ms SHING — In your view, Mr Smith.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — I think the question is legitimate without the reference to a former MP in a different life with a different hat on. I just do not see how that is at all relevant, and I do not think that we can expect the minister to account for comments made by anybody in the past that he then had no formal relationship with.

Mr MORRIS — On the point of order, Chair, if the minister cannot respond, then it is up to him to say so. It is not for the committee to edit the question before the minister even has a chance to respond.

Ms SHING — Does that mean we can ask if you think that regional Victoria is the toenails of the state?

Mr MORRIS — It is also for members to respond to a point of order once, not successively.

The CHAIR — Can Mr Smith please rephrase his question without assistance?

Mr T. SMITH — How about I put it like this. Minister, the Police Association calls for 1880 new police over the next four years. How many new sworn police officers will your government deliver to Victorians over the next four years?

Mr NOONAN — Thank you very much. I make the observation that it is nice to see that PAEC has not lost its spirit since I was in your seat, Mr Smith. It was perhaps a little louder in my day —

Ms SHING — We're just getting started, Minister!

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Minister, please do not encourage them.

Mr NOONAN — I will not encourage them; that was just an observation. Three thousand as a figure was mentioned then. Without tracing back through too much history, what we saw in the last Labor budget in 2010–11 was a commitment to recruit 1700 additional police. Obviously the change of government did see the previous government essentially deliver on that commitment, which was booked in the 2010–11 budget. On top of that, as you will know, there were 1000 additional PSOs recruited, and with the commitment around the custody officers and additional police that have been announced in this particular budget, that takes you up to about 3000 that have been recruited since that budget was handed down in 2010–11. There has been a significant increase in the numbers overall, and I think it ought to be acknowledged that that has happened. I can tell the member that at the end of March 2015 there were 13 146 full-time equivalent police, 1010 PSOs, 2721 public servants, 68 recruits in training and 4 reservists.

In thinking about this particular question it is important to acknowledge some comments by the previous chief commissioner around, if you like, the release of the blue paper last year when he indicated that politicians on both sides of the political divide had made commitments around policing without consulting police command. Essentially what he was saying was that during the 2010 election what had happened with policing policy was, in his words, it had become a Dutch auction. First it was 1500, as he says, then it was 1600, then it was 1700 and PSOs added on top. I think what the previous chief commissioner was suggesting that we do was we take a moment, consult with police command and actually work out what might constitute good policing policy. That is exactly the approach that this government is taking, because we need to be flexible in relation to the issues of community safety that will emerge during the course of this term of government, and that is what we are doing.

Mr T. SMITH — On a point of order, Chair, I appreciate that the minister has attempted to answer the question, but it was very direct. This is an estimates hearing. What is his estimate in terms of additional police numbers, sworn officers, between now and 2018? It is an estimates hearing. I want an estimate.

The CHAIR — Mr Smith, are you are making — —

Mr T. SMITH — I do not feel my question has been answered, Chair.

The CHAIR — Would you like to answer a supplementary question?

Mr T. SMITH — No.

Mr MORRIS — It was a point of order actually.

Mr T. SMITH — On the point of order, could the minister answer my question with regard to additional police numbers?

Ms SHING — Further to the point of order, Chair, the minister has answered the question by reference to the need to consult in order to determine what the best way forward is.

Mr T. SMITH — Chair, I would like an indication from the minister. That was what my question was about — new police resources over the next four years. How many new police over the next four years?

The CHAIR — I listened to what the minister said, and I understood that what the minister was advising was that he set the context in terms of what has happened over the last few years — since 2010 — and that he mentioned the fact that he is consulting with force command and will continue to do so going forward. He further referenced the fact that 400 custody officers will also increase the front line capacity.

Mr T. SMITH — Chair, my question was not related to custody officers. My question related directly to the number of sworn police officers over the next four years, and I ask you to bring the minister back to answering my question.

The CHAIR — Mr Smith, I think that if you had listened to what the minister said to date, you would appreciate the fact that custody officers will be a de facto increase to frontline officers, because it will free up officers from minding prisoners in the cells.

Mr T. SMITH — Chair, with respect, that was not my question. My question was simply pertaining to additional sworn police officers between now and 2018 — very simply.

Mr MORRIS — It is always a good idea for the Chair to stick to adjudicating and not prosecuting one side or the other, which is exactly what you are doing.

Ms SHING — Further to the point of order, Chair, in my view this requires a level of speculation, which is only going to be borne out once that relevant consultation has taken place, as the minister has indicated it will.

Mr T. SMITH — This is an estimates hearing, Ms Shing. One would have assumed there would be an estimate as to the number of new police officers.

The CHAIR — Order! Does the minister wish to add further to his response?

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, Chair. I will simply say this. The budget very clearly brings to book the \$148.6 million for the 400 custody officers. To go to the response that I have given to Dr Carling-Jenkins, we will take a different approach from the previous government and we will consult very carefully with police command as issues start to emerge in the community that we need to respond to. We need to be very careful that we do not tie the hands of Victoria Police. From a government policy point of view and from a budget point of view, we will use our future budgets to try to deliver Victoria Police in whatever way we can the sorts of resources that will make their job easier and, clearly by extension, make the community safer.

Mr MORRIS — So no extra police?

The CHAIR — Mr Smith on a supplementary.

Ms SHING — Can we stop verballing the minister, through the Chair? It is actually not correct, Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — It sounded like it to me.

Members interjecting.

Ms SHING — Again, making cheeky asides which have no factual basis in them do not help this estimates process where you are trying to extract information.

Mr MORRIS — Anyone who reads the transcript will draw the same conclusion.

Ms SHING — I look forward to reading the transcript, noting that your aside has nothing to do with the answer that the minister has just given. I seek that you withdraw that.

Mr MORRIS — It is an observation.

Ms SHING — How sad that your observations are not based on fact. My apologies, Chair.

Mr MORRIS — We will see what the numbers are at the end of the term. It will either be 15 or a big fat zero — one or the other.

Mr NOONAN — Chair, if it assists the committee, the acting chief commissioner, without addressing the issue of how many numbers, might pass some comments in relation to the sorts of challenges the organisation faces and why it may be the government needs to be attuned to those challenges.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thanks for the opportunity, Minister. Perhaps I can tell an anecdote by way of talking about the flexibility that me and the people who follow me would be seeking. Twelve months ago I was on a counterterrorism course in Scotland with senior police from around the world. I at that stage said that my greatest challenge was in keeping my people interested in counterterrorism. Sitting here 12 months later I would never have envisaged the sorts of challenges that I have before me and the community has before it. Even six months ago I would not have anticipated the sorts of challenges we would be facing.

While additional sworn police will always be welcome, for me at the moment the desire is to have greater flexibility in the way I allocate resources and the sort of people I bring to bear. For example, one of the budget initiatives this term is around the *Ice Action Plan* and additional forensic officers to give us intelligence about ice and how we might best combat it in the state. The other sorts of things that I look for are intelligence officers, often actually people outside the sworn sphere, who have expertise and skills that will supplement the work that my people do on the ground.

Ms SHING — I would like to take you, Minister, if I may, to page 83 of budget paper 3. As you indicated in your initial presentation, there is a commitment of 35.3 million over four years for police radios. I am just wondering if you could outline for the committee the importance of this program, in particular for country police.

Mr NOONAN — I thank you, Ms Shing, for your question. As you will well know through a recent visit we made to Morwell, at which you were present, this issue has been longstanding and unresolved by successive governments over a long period of time, and that is the issue of police radios in country Victoria operating on an analog system. As you know, this has been very difficult, particularly in recent times, as it has been compromising the safety of officers and their ability to catch offenders. Quite simply, those with criminal intent have been able to listen in to police conversations, and this was brought to our attention in opposition at a Police Association conference. I say by way of background for the committee's benefit that Police Association conferences are generally bipartisan and all sides of politics are invited in, to the best of my understanding.

One of the officers there raised with us his concerns, in relation to being based around Sale and Maffra, to this issue and posed the question I think more directly to the Premier initially about what could be done and issued an invitation to me in opposition to travel down to the Gippsland area in opposition, which I duly did. I had the opportunity to sit in a police car with that particular officer and listen, if you like, to real-time police radio communications, and then understand and listen to, on a very short delay of 10 seconds, that same message through a smart phone app. That was very troubling, and it prompted us to have a look at that by way of a policy response. As you can tell from this budget, there is new funding of \$11.5 million over the four years to upgrade that updated analog regional police radio system to a secure encrypted digital network, and a further

\$23.8 million for Victoria Police for the new radios will be sourced primarily from existing funds, including from the discontinuation of the legacy analog service.

As I said, that commitment responds to some very long-term concerns that those in the community with perhaps criminal intent can listen in to those conversations. What will need to happen is that in-car mobile and portable radios will need to be replaced, and that work in terms of removing the analog system will begin in July, with the digital radios phased in from 2017, and for a period the system will operate on both analog and digital to ensure smooth transition of communications.

Clearly country police have been very pleased with this particular commitment. I think, in terms of some additional comments from the acting chief commissioner, you will find that this has been one of their key priorities to get fixed. I am very pleased obviously that having had the issue raised at the Police Association conference and again in their media release on the budget day, they were highlighting this issue as one that they were most pleased to see funded in the budget. We certainly look forward to the upgrade of that radio system. It is a very important issue, and again the acting chief commissioner might want to make some points on this from an operational perspective.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Perhaps the only thing I would add is that this would have been my no. 1 priority in terms of member safety across Victoria. The anecdotes I heard, the evidence I saw, left me in no doubt that this was the greatest threat to operational safety for our members, particularly in rural Victoria, and that we had to change our practices. Our practices are inefficient because our communications are easily received by people in the community.

Perhaps one anecdote I can provide is where my firearms safety officers will not say where they are getting out of their cars. They will phone that information in because those in the community seeking to find firearms will listen to where those members go. It is just a simple example of a firearms officer going out to check on the security of firearms on a farm or a property, and we find that soon after that visit we have the property burgled. It is a simple day-to-day example. I do not need to go into the sorts of examples and the challenges we have where we are trying to communicate quickly information around threats to officers; we cannot do that over the radio system. This is really a great step for us in terms of officer safety.

Mr NOONAN — The member might recall that there was a pursuit through Gippsland last year and at one point there were about 9000 people listening in, and that made the job for police fairly difficult to try to maintain safety whilst people understood the operational tactics that the police were applying to that pursuit.

I know you will understand this as well as anyone, as too will members who represent country communities, but it is a very big issue, and it is very pleasing that we can deal with it in our first budget.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, the reference is budget overview, page 25, again the subject of police resources. I have here a copy of the front page of the *Western Port News* from 7 April 2015, and in that report, which you have no doubt seen at some point in the recent past, there is almost a parallel of the old BBC series *Yes Minister* — some may recall the hospital that worked beautifully as long as there were no patients. According to the *Western Port News* the new \$16.3 million Somerville police station, almost ready for operation, is going to open without counter service. In other words, if you happen to live in Somerville, you need to drive to Mornington or Hastings to get police advice or police assistance, even though there is a \$16.3 million brand-new police station in Somerville. Not unnaturally, the Somerville community are not particularly happy about that.

Minister, Somerville police station may well be — and I think it would almost have to be — the first brand-new police station to open without access to the public in the entire history of this state. Given the decision on the Bellarine Peninsula — and there have been some unkind interpretations about that, and I will not use those words — and given the intervention there, are you prepared to act to fix what is clearly an unacceptable situation: a police station that does not deal with the public?

Mr NOONAN — Thank you, Mr Morris, for your question. I did become aware of the Somerville police station some weeks ago in relation to its imminent opening and did make some inquiries of the acting chief commissioner's office in relation to that, so I am sure the acting chief commissioner can probably supplement this response. But I think you will probably find in that piece, or other pieces where I have been asked questions

about this, that it was the previous government that made very clearly changes to the Victoria Police Act to preserve the independence of the chief commissioner around resources. I think that is with good reason.

It does not mean for a moment that members, ministers — whether they be, in terms of members, in opposition or in government — cannot raise concerns on behalf of the community. Of course they will, and they should, and they will continue to. There is no issue there. But you do at some point have to absolutely ensure that you, in your position as minister, comply with your act, and that is the situation in relation to Somerville.

The decision in relation to resources, in relation to the opening, in relation to whether it has a counter service and in relation to who ends up at that station is a decision made by the acting chief commissioner and police command. It is not something that is made by the minister or the minister's office, and nor should it, and it is preserved in the act. Of course we have had some discussions in relation to Geelong and Bellarine. We have had those over a number of months. We have had discussions about them in terms of the sorts of issues that I spoke about earlier, in terms of the emerging issues of ice and the issues about problems in the CBD area. It is a very big population centre, you will appreciate, and Bellarine is a very significant population growth area as well.

To that end, you will appreciate from what I have said to you that the changes made by the previous government to the act preserved very clearly the independence of the chief commissioner around issues such as the ones you are asking about. I would probably even draw your attention to a range of police stations throughout the eastern suburbs that the previous government promised would be open certain hours of the day that the previous chief commissioner started to push back on, around operational grounds. The previous police minister respected that, quite frankly, as he needed to. I do not think the situation is any different here. The acting chief commissioner might want to supplement that in relation to Somerville.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — The final decision on the staffing of Somerville has not been made nor announced yet, but the Deputy Chair is correct. I anticipate that we will not provide a counter service from that, but I need to reiterate that we have not made that final decision. My observation is that to provide a counter service to that facility would take a minimum of two members per day, assuming an 8-hour shift, which actually occupies four members full time. If you take 200 shifts per member per year, it would require me to reallocate four members permanently from the neighbouring stations. My judgement is that I would prefer to have those members available for patrols to Somerville and surrounding areas rather than take them from the neighbouring stations to provide a counter service which I do not think justifies the commitment.

Mr MORRIS — I thank the acting chief commissioner for that response. Minister, noting the substance of your answer — and it appears to me from that that you are clearly quite comfortable with having a \$16.3 million facility not accessible to the public — can you guarantee that the proposed Mernda police station will be open to the public?

Mr NOONAN — Again, I am glad you have asked a question about Mernda. I would perhaps reflect back on some of the remarks that I made earlier because I think, to be fair, that it is a very reasonable question that you have put. Before Labor made a commitment on Mernda, I sat down with police and very carefully tried to understand whether or not, if we made a commitment on Mernda, it was actually needed. I do not know what the lead-up to Somerville was. Obviously I was not in government. I do not know whether those discussions occurred or not. But in the case of Mernda, I very carefully sat down with the chief commissioner at the time, Ken Lay, and just tried to understand if we made a commitment around Mernda, would that be something that would be valued in relation to policing coverage and resourcing, because I had, obviously, the City of Whittlesea — and the previous police minister would have had the same — talking about how that municipality was growing. By memory it was going to be the size of Shepparton in a short period of time.

There is a range of things, from recollection, in relation to Mernda that I did check fairly carefully with the chief commissioner at the time, because I was conscious that in any commitment, particularly in the aftermath of some fairly difficult circumstances in relation to relations between the government and the previous chief commissioner around police station opening arrangements in the eastern suburbs, I needed to be conscious of that as a potential alternate police minister — and that I was. So that is the process I undertook in relation to Mernda, which I think was a responsible process and one that I feel very comfortable with, understanding that the work was done in opposition to make sure that the commitment was going to be welcomed by Victoria Police in the way that custody officers, police radios and others have been welcomed.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — On a point of order, Chair, the question was very clearly about whether the Mernda station would be open, and I do not believe that the minister has answered it.

Ms WARD — On the point of order, it would help if you actually listened to what he said. He did answer.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — No, he gave a very long and detailed explanation as to —

Ms WARD — And he spoke about Mernda.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — what the discussion was with the chief commissioner, but he did not answer the question as to whether it would ever be opened. That was the very nub of the Deputy Chair's question.

Ms SHING — Further to the point of order, Chair, given that the minister has already clearly indicated to those in this entire committee that the question of deployment of resources is a matter for the acting police commissioner —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Unless you are in Geelong or Bellarine.

Ms SHING — I fail to see how the minister is in a position to be able to answer that question.

Mr MORRIS — On the point of order, I thought the minister made it clear that if it is a Labor marginal seat, it will be open; if it is a coalition seat, it will not be.

Ms SHING — Further to the point of order, again, if Mr Morris could refrain from verballing the minister and being cheeky — —

Mr MORRIS — He is doing a great job himself.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — My interpretation of what the minister was saying was that he was again elaborating on the points of difference between policy and operational matters. Does the minister wish to elaborate on his question or does the minister wish to allow the acting chief commissioner to make any further comments?

Mr NOONAN — I think the acting chief commissioner has provided good detail to the committee in relation to Somerville. I was asked essentially to provide a comparison, if you like, between our commitment on Mernda and Somerville, and I have done my best to do that. If that has not met with the satisfaction of the committee, I am not sure what more I can do.

Ms WARD — Minister, I would like you to turn to budget paper 3, page 274, and the output costs of policing services. Within this budget, what will police be doing to stem the growing incidence of family violence?

Mr NOONAN — I thank the member for this most important question. I touched on this, obviously, in the initial presentation. That is what the government considers to be one of the most significant issues in our community and, again, from our point of view, the biggest law and order challenge in Victoria today. As part of the 2015–16 budget the government has committed \$81.3 million over five years to address the issue of family violence. Of this funding, \$40 million is for the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which includes \$4 million to support stakeholder engagement with the commission and family violence services that experience what inevitably will be an increase in demand during the period of the royal commission.

Importantly, as the member would be aware, the royal commission delivers on the government's election commitments and will inform the way we respond to family violence in the future and prevent it from occurring in the first place. I want to emphasise that point because members will be aware — it does not matter what side of the chamber you sit on — that the issue of family violence generates an enormous response from Victoria Police every year. I am sure that the acting chief commissioner will want to make some comments here, as he has publicly in the past. There are 68 000 incidents that police are responding to a year, and that is very distressing because one cannot help but think that if police are having to attend an incident, it has probably come about because a relationship is pretty fractured at that point.

What the royal commission will allow us to do as a government is look to the recommendations of that royal commission and very much look to how we can prevent incidents of family violence and the need for police to be responding. As you would expect, the work of the royal commission will comprehensively review the way in which courts, the police, corrections, child protection and legal and family violence support services operate to provide protection for family violence victims and, obviously, hold perpetrators to account; and, importantly, reduce the number of repeat offenders. I am sure the acting chief commissioner will talk about this in the context of the recent command structure that has been established inside Victoria Police to have a greater focus in this area.

I think I will stop at this point but foreshadow for this committee that you would expect to probably see in future years, perhaps through future budgets, some of those things that might come from the royal commission in terms of government initiatives. That is what royal commissions are about. That is why this government made the historical announcement to conduct Australia's first royal commission. We understand very clearly that there is a lot of work to be done. The commission has started its work. We wish them well, and we look forward to the outcomes of their work. I thank the member for her question.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — In relation to the government's Homesafe policy commitment in relation to 24-hour public transport on Friday and Saturday nights, it was originally costed at \$50 million and is in the budget at \$50 million. There has been some suggestion that that is underfunded due to the miscalculation of providing protective services officers to man the stations at a cost of \$20 million. Could you perhaps clear that up for us? What is the total cost outside the \$50 million project cost to fund additional PSOs for the trial period of the Homesafe project?

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, Mr O'Brien, for your question. Certainly the government in every way is committed to a world-class public transport system, and obviously the Minister for Public Transport will outline in detail what some of the broader commitments are in this budget for public transport. You are right in terms of your acknowledgement that there is \$50 million set aside for the trial of this Homesafe program, which clearly is articulated by the government as a plan to get people home on a Friday and Saturday night with a commencement date of 1 January next year.

Part of the trial is to fund transport security, which is what this Homesafe trial is about as a pilot. Victoria Police is working very closely with Public Transport Victoria in terms of finalising a model, if you like, but it is important to point out that the model is not just about PSOs; it is about police personnel more broadly. That can include transit police and PSOs. We would expect that there would also be work going on in terms of authorised officers, but I want to make it clear that Victoria Police and Public Transport Victoria are still working through to a point of having a safety plan. When that plan has been finalised we will in every way make that known to the travelling public. So work is still to be done.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I am not sure we got an answer on the question of the 20 million, but my supplementary, then, is: as part of the trial, will there be PSOs, transit police or sworn officers at every station, and will every station be open?

Mr NOONAN — Again, that detail is still in fact being worked through and led by Public Transport Victoria. Within that of course, as I have outlined for you, are police personnel, transit police and PSOs. Once that detail has been finalised it will be made public. That work, obviously, is being led by Public Transport Victoria. Of course from a policing point of view we want to support the 12-month trial of all-night transport on weekends, but it is important we get it right.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Would you prefer to have PSOs on every station though?

Mr NOONAN — I can clearly make this point that you would expect that there will be PSOs and transit police as part of that trial over the 12 months. You would expect to see that very strongly as part of the package. Again, once it has been finalised — Victoria Police has been doing some good work on this with Public Transport Victoria — the details of that will become clearer to the public.

Ms PENNICUIK — Ms Shing raised the question about the updating of the radio system to the digital system, which you gave a very comprehensive answer to, and that is another issue I am interested in, but in your opening remarks, Minister, you made passing reference to mobile data terminals. I do not believe they are

funded in the budget, but I know they are also a very important issue in terms of the Police Association raising the need for those to enable their work to be more efficient by using those mobile data terminals. I thought you were going to go on to say something more in your opening remarks, but you did not. Maybe you could elaborate on that now.

Mr NOONAN — In fact we might be talking about two different things. I might seek clarification from you. I might get — —

Ms SHING — Before we go on — through the Chair — Sue, have you got a budget paper reference that I can have a look at?

Ms PENNICUIK — No, I am referring to what the minister said in his opening remarks.

The CHAIR — Sorry, Ms Pennicuik. Does this relate to the presentation? I am having trouble hearing because the microphone is away from your mouth.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Yes. I did not hear the question.

The CHAIR — Could you refer to whereabouts in the presentation — —

Ms PENNICUIK — I am not sure if it is written down, but the minister did mention mobile data terminals in his remarks.

Ms SHING — On police radios?

Ms PENNICUIK — On police radios.

Mr NOONAN — I am happy to take the question. Certainly what I referenced is that as part of this upgrade — and Mr Bates will probably clarify this here — there are about 3000 units that need to be replaced, which include in-car, mobile and portable radios, that will then operate on the secure digital network. I think what you might be referring to is perhaps an in-car tablet which collects data. Is that correct?

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes. It is enabling the police to receive and send data from their police vehicle rather than having to wait until they return to the station to do those things.

Mr NOONAN — What I might do, Chair, if that is all right, is I might get Mr Bates to provide some additional information in relation to this specific commitment and then come back to your issue, which I think I have got a better handle on now.

Mr BATES — Chair, I think the budget paper reference is probably page 46 of BP4, which is the capital program. The question, I think, is in relation to an issue that was funded last year, which is the Police Information Process and Practice reform program, so it is an existing program that is continuing from the last budget. We have got some estimates here in the budget papers on what we will spend this year.

We are still doing work to develop the systems that would allow Victoria Police to roll out tablets to members. The mobile data terminals are in a fixed number of cars at the moment. We are trying to develop systems so that we could go to tablets which members can take out of the cars and walk around with, so we could have a much larger number of mobile devices like these. That is an ongoing program which we are still working on.

Ms PENNICUIK — I thank Mr Bates for his clarification. On a supplementary, Minister, as I understand it the Police Association wanted the MDTs in every vehicle, and they are in some vehicles. For clarification, are you saying they will not be put in all vehicles and instead there will be tablets? Is that going to be superseding MDTs?

Mr NOONAN — Again, can I refer that question to Mr Bates?

The CHAIR — Sure.

Mr BATES — Yes. It is our intention that the members will have secure mounts in the vehicles when they are in the vehicle, but the ability to take the tablets out of the vehicle and then use them to collect information at

crimes scenes and from victims and then upload it immediately back into our systems is where force command wants to go, so we think it is a lot more flexible to have devices that can be walked around with the members rather than being stuck to the vehicle.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Minister, I want to ask you a bit more about the ice task force, and specifically budget paper 3, pages 16 and 17, in reference to VicPol's forensic drug branch. It seems to be new funding, so I want to find out a bit more about that.

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, Mr Dimopoulos, for your question. Indeed it does relate to a pre-election commitment and probably follows, if you like, an important body of work that was done by an equivalent parliamentary committee in the last term of government to look at the very challenging and emerging issue of ice and the sort of devastation that it continues to wreak across Melbourne and country Victoria. You may recall that the now Premier when he was in opposition committed an incoming Labor government to an ice task force to produce an action plan. I was very fortunate to be a member of that particular task force, supported by Deputy Commissioner Lucinda Nolan as well from Victoria Police.

Part of that commitment — and this shows the benefit of having a level of flexibility in terms of your budget — was in relation to the new drug and booze buses. Beyond that commitment — not an insignificant commitment; a \$15 million commitment — were some further commitments around maintaining the roadside random drug testing at 100 000 over the next couple of years. Again, off a reasonably low base, it was lifted in recent times, and importantly it has been lifted again. I think the statistic that stands out from the ice task force work is really around the number of positive tests coming through that Victoria Police are recording which involve methamphetamines, which is really at quite high levels. Obviously where you have that you have consequences in terms of serious injury and in worst cases death from that.

To come back to this issue of the new commitment of \$4.5 million that you have identified in the budget to expand, if you like, the capacity of Victoria Police's forensic drug branch, you will understand from that it will allow Victoria Police to recruit additional scientist analysts to cope with the increasing demand in terms of both analysing drugs as they come to the lab but also using that information for intelligence purposes. Obviously one of the key challenges in terms of ice is around the issue of supply and tackling the supply aspect of this drug, as too is tackling demand and of course harm. What that will allow Victoria Police to do is recruit and train additional forensics officers and forensic intelligence analysts. That is a very important commitment because in recent times the police forensics division has found it quite challenging in relation to their staffing profile to keep up with the demands that these sorts of emerging drugs have created for them in terms of workload.

The acting chief commissioner might want to make some supplementary comments in relation to the importance of this particular resource. Again this was not specifically a pre-election commitment but something that emerged out of the ice task force, which was identified as a key area of resourcing challenge for Victoria Police, which has been brought to book in terms of the ice task force work. I have since been out to Macleod, where the forensics operate, and spoken directly to those people who work in the drug branch, and they are very, very pleased with this particular investment. It will make a significant difference.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Perhaps I can give a bit more colour to this in terms of the practicality of what we anticipate these intelligence officers and analysts will do. We have to give this information to target our resources, so for instance they will tell us what sort of chemicals are going into the methamphetamine mixtures we are seeing, what we might look for in terms of precursors and how the different recipes, if you like, vary from time to time and place to place. They will also connect up with other forensics officers to make connections in terms of DNA, fingerprinting or modus operandi — the way things are done — which again enhances our capacity to target particular times, places, risks.

The connections do not stop there. We do not do this in isolation. These analysts will also work with the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine around what is being experienced there in terms of drug overdoses and deaths, which will help the community to better target the education and health initiatives. I think this is potentially a very great benefit outside policing as well as within our own targeting of drug dealers.

Mr T. SMITH — Minister, I refer you to the 2015–16 budget overview, page 25, related to police resources. Do you commit to maintaining the statewide benchmark of 102 first response officers per 100 000 of population over the forward estimates?

Mr NOONAN — What we commit to do is work very closely with police command in relation to their resources. I know this question has been asked in a number of different ways and I understand why it is being asked too, but if you take the question that Mr Dimopoulos just asked, what can be taken from that question and indeed that answer is very clearly a government responding to a community safety challenge. If you go out to any regional community and talk to them about the impact of ice, you will understand that the sorts of investments that are being made in some of the areas that we have spoken about are actually really important investments that go beyond simple police numbers.

The commitment that you will get from us is that we will continue to apply that in terms of future budgets. We will continue to apply that model of sitting down and working very closely with police command as a partnership, with the Police Association and of course with the community in relation to the issues of police resources going forward. Again, without labouring the point, I think the police blue paper last year probably taught us that if you do that well, you will actually get enhanced community safety outcomes. I think everyone wants that. It might be, from some members' points of view, not a preferred option, but I think it is the one, you are hearing very clearly from me, that the incoming government will adopt.

Mr T. SMITH — Minister, isn't your government's view with regard to frontline police numbers totally out of step with community expectations on this issue?

Ms SHING — On a point of order, Chair, asking the minister whether the allocation of police resources, which I think has now been explained three or four times — —

Mr MORRIS — Not the allocation; police resources.

Ms SHING — Asking the minister whether police resources are out of step with community expectations is not directly linked to the explanations which have happened three or four times now in relation to how they are deployed and allocated.

Mr MORRIS — It is nothing to do with allocation.

Ms SHING — Thank you, Mr Morris. If you wish to speak to the point of order, why don't you that?

Mr D. O'BRIEN — On the point of order, Chair, it is entirely appropriate for a member of this committee to ask the minister what he is doing in the budget in relation to what the community wants. I do not know why the government seems to be so sensitive about this issue of additional police resources.

Ms SHING — In response to your commentary, Mr O'Brien, the minister has been absolutely crystal clear in his presentation in just about every answer he has given in relation to the way in which policing policy on numbers and resource allocation has been developed.

Mr T. SMITH — I think this is an entirely appropriate question. There is a key point of difference here between the government and the coalition. We absolutely support frontline police numbers growing commensurate with population growth; clearly the government has a different view. I am asking the minister how his view correlates with community expectations. I think that is entirely appropriate.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — The matter of community expectations was settled on 29 November.

The CHAIR — While I acknowledge the fact that the minister has made a number of contributions on this point over a particular length of time, I am happy for the question to stand and the minister to answer it.

Mr NOONAN — I am happy to answer it, and I will answer it this way: I think the community's expectation is that we keep them safe. You have heard the acting chief commissioner today talk about his own experience in relation to counterterrorism. I think what you are hearing from the acting chief commissioner is an account that has been formed over four decades of policing, and it is a lesson for us all, frankly, that things can emerge quite quickly. If a government of the day simply ties the hands of a Chief Commissioner of Police, or an acting chief commissioner in this case, it may in fact make it more difficult for police to keep the community safe.

That is the model that this incoming government is adopting. I make this clear point: every single commitment that Labor made from opposition is being fulfilled in our first budget, and that gives us a high level of flexibility to respond to the sorts of statements that you have heard the acting chief commissioner make today. That is our objective; that is what we see as a model that will keep the community safe. Again, I make the very clear point that the outgoing chief commissioner was very clear in terms of what he considered to be Dutch auctions involving police numbers. I am sure that he would have made a point to the previous government that what he wanted to see was something that was more responsive to the emerging community safety issues that arise in any year or over any four-year term of government.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — I again refer to budget paper 3, page 90, and further to the last supplementary question from the Deputy Chair regarding the Mernda police station. I am going to ask a very similar question, perhaps without the political loading. Will you guarantee, quite simply, that the new station will be adequately staffed once built?

Mr NOONAN — I thank Dr Carling-Jenkins for her question. I would say this: you will notice that with our commitment around the station that it is not badged up to be 24 hours or 16 hours because, to go to the points that I have made throughout this session, that is a matter for the police, the acting chief commissioner, and in fact police command. We will work very closely with police in relation to this particular commitment in relation to resourcing. I note that the delivery of this police station is set, in terms of completion date, at September 2017, although it is contingent, of course, on commencing land acquisition and finalising that at the earliest opportunity. We will work very closely with Victoria Police in relation to resourcing, understanding very clearly that the independence in relation to the deployment of specific resources is a matter for Victoria Police.

Again, to go to the issues that have been raised in the past, we have been careful not to tie police hands in relation to the operational aspects of this particular police station; although to go to my earlier comments that you would have heard, we checked off very closely in opposition that in fact a station would be supported by Victoria Police in circumstances where we committed to it.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — I understand the operational aspects, and I appreciate that answer. I guess I would just like a little bit more of a commitment. Has provision been made in forward estimates to staff this station at a particular level?

Mr NOONAN — Again, if you look at the issue of custody officers, once you deploy those custody officers into police stations, either in that region or throughout Melbourne or Victoria, you have a capacity, essentially, to add additional sworn police to stations, units, tasking at the discretion of Victoria Police.

As we get closer to that station opening, clearly we will talk to Victoria Police specifically about the additional resources that may be required in relation to that, if indeed Victoria Police raise that as an issue. Again, you should understand that as it stands at the moment Victoria Police have over 13 000 full-time equivalent police, so if it is that they seek to engage in discussions with us at a future point around particular resources for that or any other part of policing activity, we will certainly seek to be able to respond. The acting chief commissioner might wish to supplement that if he believes it necessary.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thanks, Minister. I cannot give an absolute commitment; 2017 — who knows what will happen. But on current planning we would expect that Mernda would be open as a 24-hour station and staffed accordingly.

Ms SHING — Minister, I would like to take you to page 273 of BP 3. I note that VicPol aims to undertake 100 000 drug tests in the 2015–16 year. I would like you, if you can, to tell the committee a little bit more about this initiative in terms of the total number and what you hope to achieve through that number.

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, Ms Shing. I am grateful for this question and I touched on it, I think, in an earlier answer, but it is good to spend a bit more time on it. Obviously the government shares very closely with the community the concerns about illicit drugs and the negative impact more broadly on the Victorian community. As I have articulated previously in answers, the \$15 million for new booze and drug buses is important. It will replace, if you like, the obsolete fleet that is there. We expect out of that commitment — the \$15 million — that there will be about 10 drug and booze buses as part of the fleet going forward.

But importantly, through discussions at the Transport Accident Commission, there has been a decision made in relation to additional availability of random roadside drug testing for the next two years, and that will be maintained at the current level of 100 000 roadside random drug tests. This is a very important commitment. It is often lost in terms of the detail of the budget, but it is a very important commitment in terms of the state's commitment to road safety. What this will do is it will ensure that we have enhancement around our roadside drug testing, which should send a very strong message to motorists in terms of deterring them in relation to driving whilst under the influence of illegal drugs.

I think it is also important to note that the government has, if you like, re-established the Ministerial Council on Road Safety, of which I am a member. You will note, Ms Shing, that we have a minister for road safety, who will probably appear before your committee, I presume, in the next week or so.

In terms of this particular commitment, obviously if you increase the level of roadside testing, yes, it acts as a deterrent, but it should also be taking dangerous drivers off the road. I refer again just briefly to something I was able to pick up during the ice task force: that of the 2500 positive drug tests over the last 12 months or so about 80 per cent of those have involved methamphetamines. Clearly ice is a particular challenge in terms of road safety, as it is in the community. We think that this important commitment will assist in our very, very strong desire to drive down the level of serious injuries and of course deaths on our roads, so it is an important commitment.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — If I may — on indulgence for a moment — because I think this will probably be the last coalition question, I believe the acting chief commissioner is retiring from the force in July. On behalf of us, and I am sure on behalf of all members of the committee, we wish you all the best and thank you very much for your service over the years.

Ms WARD — We can have furious agreement on that.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thank you.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Now, back to battle! Goodwill only extends so far. Minister, budget paper 3, page 275, references the enhancing community safety output measure, which encompasses the community crime prevention program, which you have had a bit to say about today. The previous government provided funding for this program of important, community-focused, grassroots crime prevention organisations, such as Neighbourhood Watch, Crime Stoppers and Step Back. Think. Minister, can you confirm that the funding to these community organisations has in fact been cut?

Mr NOONAN — Perhaps what I should do is also place on record my strong appreciation — with the indulgence of the committee chair — for the long-term dedication and commitment of the acting chief commissioner, Tim Cartwright. He has in every way stepped up in recent times with the sudden retirement of the chief commissioner. It will be a very, very big loss to the organisation, but his commitment more broadly to the Victorian community and community safety has been absolutely outstanding. I am sure I speak for all sides of politics in terms of wishing him the very best for the future.

In terms of community safety and crime prevention specifically, which was your question, I make the point, without being too repetitive, that Labor's approach and the purpose of our review is to look at the root causes of crime. The Royal Commission into Family Violence is particularly important in that regard. We do not want police simply having to go out to more and more family violence incidents. The work of the ice action task force will be an important feature of our term in government.

To the issues of the community crime prevention initiatives: they too are important in the context of providing small allocations of funding to a range of organisations. What we have announced today in terms of funding is a total package of \$5.8 million. The sorts of organisations that you have referred to will in every way be eligible to apply for grants under the various streams of grants programs that are available with this particular allocation. The government will essentially need to finalise the guidelines before opening up the opportunity for organisations to apply, and there is a very broad opportunity for organisations such as those you have referenced to apply for grants funding.

I think that is appropriate. What we want to see is evidence-based outcomes in terms of crime prevention. That is what we want. I make the point that what we have seen over the last four years is crime rates increase each

and every year. There will be various views about why that has happened and whether it is driven by having more police or whether it is driven by economic circumstances. The truth is that it is probably a bit of everything.

I have asked my parliamentary secretary, Ben Carroll, to do a review in this particular area. He is already out there consulting with stakeholders, including some of those I think you may have mentioned, in order to ensure that any ongoing investments that Labor or the government makes in this particular area of government have, wherever we can, a good outcome focus to them. I think we all share a collective desire to see crime reduced in our community, and that is what these grants will hopefully achieve once they are allocated.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, I take that on board, although I think it confirms that those organisations specifically are not receiving grants. I note your advice about the review to be undertaken by the parliamentary secretary, and I ask: why is the review necessary when the Australian Institute of Criminology actually undertook a review of the community crime prevention program last year. In its report entitled *Evaluation of the Victorian Community Crime Prevention Program* it states, amongst other things:

... the evaluation clearly demonstrates that the CCPP is a highly valued contribution to the Victorian community crime prevention ... field.

... strong support for the continuation ...

... it is clear that if ongoing funding was provided, the CCPU would be able to further improve the efficiencies for the delivery —

et cetera.

Why are we doing another review when there was already one completed only last year that says this is a successful program that you appear now to be cutting?

Mr NOONAN — I do not think it is right to be suggesting that we are cutting funding. Funding is available. It goes through the grants process in terms of organisations applying. I think it is fair and reasonable for any government that has a chance to govern to actually have a look at some of the areas of their administration and work out whether they can get better. It is not to suggest for a moment, Mr O'Brien, that independent reviews that have been done or programs that have been funded in the past are not of value; there is no question there. From our point of view, again coming off consecutive years of growth in terms of overall crime, what we want to do is just actually have a look at it — I do not think that is inappropriate — to see whether we can strengthen it. And alongside the work that we are doing in other areas — such as ice, such as family violence — you would expect that, at the very least, incoming governments might have a look at these areas and, importantly, consult with some of those organisations, because again what you want to do is you want to collect the best evidence you possibly can, and over a period of years.

There may in fact be some things that those organisations have not had an opportunity to discuss with the government of the day because they have been locked into a funding program that essentially has been following the dollar, if you like, as opposed to offering new evidence that could strengthen the government's commitment to improve their crime prevention programs. That is what we are seeking to do, and in the interim there is funding available, as it has been in the past, for some of those programs that the previous government had put in place. By way of an explanation, I hope that helps.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Is that funding in the media release today in the budget anywhere?

Mr NOONAN — Yes. I can provide you with a reference. Go to budget paper 3 on page 269. The funding for that particular program comes from the second line item underneath 'Policing' — 'Infringements and enhancing community safety'. That is where the allocation comes from.

Ms WARD — Minister, I want to ask you about the new booze and drug buses. I would like to refer you to page 18 of budget paper 3. Can you please outline for us the government's plan for new booze and drug buses?

Mr NOONAN — Thanks, Ms Ward, for your question. Indeed, as I may have referenced earlier, the issues of drink and drug driving are leading contributors to road trauma, and of course what you need by way of a response through Victoria Police, the TAC and others is a highly visible and active enforcement program which creates in every way a perceived and actual risk of detection for those people who are out there driving.

Obviously in the lead-up to the 2014 election in opposition Labor made a very clear commitment around upgrading the new booze and drug buses. The advice we were able to receive from opposition was that the fleet was becoming obsolete and indeed needed to be replaced in time.

We have had some very positive discussions with Victoria Police about the changeover of the fleet. The acting chief commissioner might want to make some comments about this, but this is about essentially ensuring that our next generation of booze and drug buses in every way are fit for purpose. As I provided in a previous answer, we have been able to complement this investment, if you like, by way of the additional drug testing. So in some respects whilst it is of value to have an upgraded fleet on the road, if you do not match that with the investment around lifting your capacity to tackle an emerging issue, such as people taking drugs and driving, you are leaving yourself a bit short, and that is what has been dealt with very quickly by government.

Clearly what we want to do here in terms of the new fleet and the additional testing is very much influence and change poor road user behaviour in terms of drink and drug driving. It is a very significant challenge for Victoria Police and the Victorian community and a very important commitment that we bring to book in our first budget and have not wasted time, essentially, getting on with it. With those words, I might ask the acting chief commissioner just to complement what I have been able to share with the committee in relation to the issue of drug testing and the need to upgrade the fleet.

Acting Chief Comm. CARTWRIGHT — Thanks, Minister, and thanks, Chair, for giving me the capacity to answer the question. Again, we are looking for flexibility here. We have eight large existing fleets — eight large buses, four small buses — but they are no longer fit for purpose. So what we will get to is a fleet of four large buses, six smaller buses, but even within the smaller buses greater capacity to allocate them to areas we could not have put them in before — small country roads, even small feeder roads in the metro areas. They will supplement the booze testing, the drug testing, that we do from our vehicles — from our cars, from our highway patrol cars.

The other thing that we will achieve with this is, while our drug testing has largely been intelligence based in the past, we will actually move to a broader random breath testing, random drug testing regime. As in all things road policing, we work with our partner agencies to identify the best practices. So the supply of these buses in the three-year cycle will help us with that and — the research indicates, again — bring down Victoria's road toll.

The CHAIR — I would like to thank the Honourable Wade Noonan, the Minister for Police, for his time today, as well as Mr Wilson, Mr Bates and Ms De Cicco. To Mr Cartwright, the Acting Chief Commissioner of Police, on behalf of the committee, as has been expressed previously, thank you for your service to the state of Victoria, and we wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

The committee will follow up on one question that was taken on notice. That was a question from Ms Pennicuik in relation to mobile data terminals. If a written response could be provided within 21 days of that request, that would be appreciated.

Witnesses withdrew.