

CHAPTER 2: PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS

2.1 Parliamentary Departments Transcript

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 8 May 2009

Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva
Ms J. Huppert
Ms J. Munt
Mr W. Noonan
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Scott
Mr B. Stensholt
Dr W. Sykes
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Mr R. Smith, President of the Legislative Council,
Ms J. Lindell, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,
Mr R. Purdey, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly,
Mr W. Tunnecliffe, Clerk of the Legislative Council, and
Dr S. O’Kane, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Victoria.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2009–10 budget estimates for the portfolio of parliamentary departments. On behalf of the committee I welcome the Honourable Jennifer Lindell, MP, Speaker, Legislative Assembly; Ray Purdey, Clerk, Legislative Assembly; Wayne Tunnecliffe, Clerk, Legislative Council; and Stephen O’Kane, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services. Departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome. We expect the Honourable Robert Smith, MLC, President, Legislative Council, to join us shortly.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public that they cannot participate in the committee’s proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers, as requested by the Speaker or her assistant, can approach the table during the hearing. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council Committee Room.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing — that is, the door — are not protected by parliamentary privilege. There is no need for evidence to be sworn. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days of this hearing. In accordance with past practice, the transcripts and any PowerPoint presentations will then be placed on the committee’s website.

Following a presentation by the presiding officers, committee members will ask questions relating to the budget estimates. Generally the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. In other words, do not have a series of questions but if there is any need for clarification, that can be done.

I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off. Remember that these microphones are quite sensitive and it has an impact on Hansard if people have their phones on and near them.

I should also mention that Bill Sykes is an apology for today.

Mr WELLS — And Robert Smith.

The CHAIR — I will ignore that one. I now call on the presiding officers to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolio of parliamentary departments.

Ms LINDELL — Thank you for the invitation to today’s committee meeting and the opportunity to provide a report on the Parliament’s efforts in the last 12 months, and looking forward to the next 12 months.

Overheads shown.

Ms LINDELL — Members will know that we have four appropriation groups, being the Department of the Legislative Council, the Department of the Legislative Assembly, the Department of Parliamentary Services and the parliamentary investigatory committees. Our annual appropriation: our expected outcome for 2009 is \$78.9 million, with a 2009–10 budget of \$88.2 million. Special appropriations are \$38.4 million — our expected outcome for 2008–09 — and our budget of \$38.5 million for 2009–10, making total appropriations of \$117.3 million as our expected outcome and \$126.7 million is our budget figure. Of course this excludes the funding for the Auditor-General’s office.

If we look forward to next year and what parliamentary staff and the presiding officers have seen as some of the challenges that we face, certainly there is the maintenance of services in a climate of restricted resources. We have the implementation of the electorate officers enterprise agreement within our existing resources. We also have the conclusion and obviously implementation of the parliamentary officers enterprise agreement. There is the development of the infrastructure for video webcasting of parliamentary sessions of both the Council and the Assembly. We will continue with the development of our parliamentary precinct master plan.

Obviously there is ongoing support for committees of the Legislative Council, which are difficult to quantify and budget for. There is the planning for the upgrade of the security infrastructure on the precinct and the continuation of the heritage asset management strategy.

We obviously need some planning for the 2010 state election. There are a number of changes that take place after every election, and the Parliament puts in an effort around trying to plan, in a budgetary sense, for the changes that occur.

There is an expanding community engagement program that the Parliament has, building on the DVDs that we do for school children and the development of our parliamentary information talks that go out to the regions. As I say, there will be an expansion of that program in the next year.

If we can talk about some of our achievements, certainly they included the regional sittings at Churchill and Lakes Entrance. We had a technically very successful day in Churchill. I think the basic infrastructure in Lakes Entrance suffered a little bit, but that was a Telstra network problem rather than a parliamentary problem. Certainly at Churchill, because we were at the university site that had the basic infrastructure, we had a very seamless day there.

We have completed the rollout of new computers and network-related infrastructure to the electorate offices, including the 4 megabyte wide area network, which was a very big project for technical staff.

We have implemented the remote working solution for MPs with the wireless technology. We have access now on our laptops to the 3G network. We have completed the negotiation around electorate officers' EBAs. That is still not finally concluded. The negotiations have concluded; the staff is still to vote on the negotiated EBA.

As I mentioned before, the educational DVDs, as a resource in primary and secondary curriculums and also for adult English language students, have been very well received.

We have had another 14 either relocations or refurbishments of electorate offices.

The chamber sound system upgrade was completed and, on its completion, we were then able to implement the audio webcasting of parliamentary proceedings.

We had two open days for Parliament — one in November and one in March. Both were very well attended, and both had very positive feedback from members of the general public.

There was certainly an increased effort on behalf of all staff around the passage of the abortion bill and the assisted reproduction technology bill, which was a great effort on behalf of the staff who had to service the sittings of the house.

Going on with more achievements for Parliament, obviously the scaffolding around the building tells us that the Parliament heritage asset management strategy continues. We are continuing in a very methodical manner with the replacement of some of the stonework that is crumbling with age. After 150 years it is a bit tired. As I say, that continues in a pretty orderly manner and is done within the confines of that strategy.

We joined with Sustainability Victoria's Resource Smart program and have now a sustainability framework for the Parliament. In the context of the precinct master plan we have sustainability, and quite central to the development of that plan we are looking at how we can make the best fit of Parliament and our footprint moving forward.

We have introduced the regional parliamentary information talks program, which is quite keenly sought after in regional areas. We have trained staff who go out and talk to schoolchildren in regional areas. We have had some very successful days. Down at Warrnambool, which I think was the first one we did, we had about 500 or 600 primary school students over that day. That obviously supplements the visits when they come in here.

There has been a massive project going on with the library in the redevelopment of our internet site. That is continuing — it is almost completed — but it has been a mammoth task.

That is our report. We will now bare ourselves open to grilling from the committee.

The CHAIR — I welcome the President, and I thank you, Speaker, for the presentation. I might ask — as I tend to ask — you to supply with us some information in terms of reconciliation between the estimates votes in the Appropriation (Parliament 2009/10) Bill, which is seeking to appropriate approximately \$83 million for the departments, as opposed to the figure you had up on the slide of \$126 million.

Ms LINDELL — That is the exclusion of the Auditor-General's office.

The CHAIR — I have taken the Auditor-General out of my question.

Dr O'KANE — As I have done in the past, Chair, I have asked my department to produce a reconciliation of the department's budget papers with the appropriation bill for each of the parliamentary departments, excluding VAGO and including VAGO, so I am happy to table that.

The CHAIR — That would be terrific. Can you perhaps just outline for the Hansard transcript the basic elements of the difference?

Dr O'KANE — Sure. The main differences really relate to, in particular, my budget, which is one of the large ones. It includes the carryover of members allowances from the electorate office and communications budget. As the Speaker said, in budget paper 4 the difference between what you saw on the slide and also the comprehensive operating statement are the amounts for the Auditor-General's office. That is all listed in the reconciliation, so I will table that and provide that to members of the committee.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — An issue that was raised at I think the hearing before last was a satisfactory outcome between the Parliament and the government in terms of remuneration for table officers and putting in place a mechanism for adjustments. What progress has been made on that?

Ms LINDELL — That matter has been resolved. There is now a system in place whereby any movement in the executive officer pays at the Victorian public service is reflected in a movement in pay for the clerks at the Parliament.

Ms MUNT — You mentioned during your presentation negotiations for electorate officers in the EBA. I know my electorate officers are very interested in that particular subject. Could you just expand on that and update us on exactly where those negotiations are up to?

Ms LINDELL — We have agreement from the government and agreement from IR Vic and agreement with the union, and it will be open for a staff ballot within the next week or so. Staff will be corresponded with, I think in the next couple of days, but it is at a stage where all staff will now — ongoingly there has been information available on the intranet for staff, but we have an offer and an agreed position and hopefully the staff will tick that off.

Mr SMITH — The department has set up a system through the Lotus Notes mechanism for the staff to actually vote on that electronically with confidentiality, and that would be accepted by the commission if it is a positive outcome — reasonably confident it will be.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Just in relation to budget paper 3, on page 270, this is in relation to parliamentary services. I certainly do not want this seen as anything other than what I am looking at in terms of the figures. In relation to the service provided to the members of Parliament and I gather to others, I note in terms of quality 'Client satisfaction with the quality of information provided' and 'Members, staff and officers satisfied or better with the services provided', the first thing is it does not specify which services are tested against. But I notice in 2007-08, for example, the client satisfaction was 94 per cent and the satisfaction by members of services provided was 89 per cent. Into the forward estimates it has been dropped down to 85 per cent and 80 per cent, so a respective drop of 9 per cent.

I was just curious in terms of why you would expect a reduction in service quality, given there is an increase in expenditure and what have you identified as those areas that do need improvement and how are you rectifying those improvements?

Ms MUNT — The targets seem to be the same to me.

Ms LINDELL — I am a bit confused.

The CHAIR — Do you want some clarification?

Ms LINDELL — Yes. I see that we have targets.

The CHAIR — Probably another way of framing the question, if I may, would be: you achieved 94 per cent and 89 per cent in 2007–08; would it be reasonable for the Parliament — and Mr Dalla-Riva said you received more money — to actually increase your targets?

Ms LINDELL — Lift the targets.

The CHAIR — Does that seem fair enough?

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes, because it just seems to be that there is an increase of expenditure, as you outline in the achievements, yet it is not reflected in what service should be provided to the members or indeed to the staff themselves in terms of what your expectations of satisfaction levels are.

Ms LINDELL — The President and I signed off on some increased targets just last week, but I do not believe that they were — —

The CHAIR — They have not appeared in here.

Ms LINDELL — I do not think they were those. I think they were more around the library.

Dr O’KANE — I think the answer to your question is that we are constantly monitoring and adjusting these. One of the difficulties we have had in the past is actually having sufficient people to fill out the client satisfaction surveys and actually getting sufficient responses in the form we can use. We are continually reviewing that. What we do is — we have again reviewed it this year and we have a more comprehensive survey that is in process now that is being administered by Roy Morgan. Given the greater complexity in that survey, we think that we are more able to capture a better and more accurate result. So I guess we see this very much as a refining of the process and maybe the baseline might change for that.

I draw your attention — if you go up a little further — to the targets relating to the library and research. They were also adjusted, but in that particular case they were adjusted up, and the reason they were adjusted up was because of the unprecedented amount of social legislation and other things before the houses. The services that have been required by members have substantially increased both in reference and also in research. What we are trying to do is adjust these so that they are accurate all of the time and create a much closer measure of how people are going and what the nature of the requests are.

So we are continually improving those, and you will see from that particular reference to the library that the demand was substantially increased. I would be able to get you more information on that, a little bit more detailed response, if you would like.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes. The library is one component of it, and I appreciate the increase, but in terms of what parliamentary services provides, if you read across the top it is not only the library, there is Hansard, education, HR, finance, IT and maintenance of grounds and facilities.

Ms LINDELL — Can I add there, though, that one of the difficulties that the Parliament has is getting a response to the survey asking for client satisfaction from members. While we change the format of that and change the questions and try to make it easier and less time-consuming for members to respond to, we would almost appreciate a little bit of constancy in the targets so we do not set ourselves up for a fall in the sense that all of a sudden we have got the survey right and many more members respond, and we have that skew of statistics that occurs when all of a sudden more people are engaged in the process. It is a little bit of a work in progress.

Certainly on the face of it you would say, ‘Yes, lift your targets right up’, but if we actually get a mechanism whereby members will engage, then we can have a problem there for no other reason than we have actually managed to get the survey and the time taken and the effort taken perfected.

Mr WELLS — Roughly how many people are responding to these surveys that you put out?

Dr O’KANE — I will have to take that on notice to get you some more definite information. But the response rates are quite low.

Ms LINDELL — Last year, 21 MPs out of 128.

Mr SMITH — I will make a comment also that I generally believe that the service is constantly improving in almost every area. The number of actual complaints or issues that I get are reducing — I am not saying there are never any — and those that we do get in a whole range of areas are being addressed, I believe, quicker and speedier. If people want to disagree with that, fine, but that is certainly my view.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that.

Mr NOONAN — I note that the Parliament held two open days this financial year, both in November and in March. I wonder whether you can advise the committee on the reasons for holding two open days within the financial year. What plans exist for the future? You referred to their being well-attended; perhaps you have some figures there and information on how feedback is collected on those days.

Ms LINDELL — The two open days in the one financial year came about because of a view that to move last year's open day to November to coincide with the centenary of women's suffrage was a positive thing that the Parliament could do, and in fact the whole theme of the day was women's suffrage. We did a lot of work with the Office of Women's Policy. We had an art exhibition in the garden; we had performance all day. A number of people who had been recipients of the regional grants for the celebration of the women's centenary came down and performed on that day. It was a much larger joint function for the celebration of women's suffrage, and that meant that the open day was pushed into this financial year.

Then we held another open day in March as our more typical open day. One of the views was that we would like to keep them as much as possible on that annual, 12-monthly rollover, and the thought was that with 2010 being an election year we would be wanting to have the open day in the first six months of 2010 simply because of the workload on staff as we come into the election process.

I think we had 3000 people on both days — nearly 3000. The feedback is terrific. I do not know whether any members of the committee have attended on open day, but a lot of overseas visitors come and a lot of family groups come. They are just fabulous. People go around on a self-guided tour. We have stands with the electoral commission and with the Auditor-General, and we try to sort of expand it to include Parliament and some of the complementary agencies.

The CHAIR — Are you still doing the Show Day?

Ms LINDELL — Yes.

The CHAIR — That makes it three a year.

Ms LINDELL — The show is still done through our community engagement program.

The CHAIR — Members of Parliament have been along to the show — they used to go, anyway.

Mr PURDEY — We usually do that every second year.

The CHAIR — Every second year?. I know it is a big effort.

Ms PENNICUIK — You mentioned the finalisation of the EBA. Can I ask if the overtime budget for electorate officers is going to be maintained?

Ms LINDELL — The proposal that staff have to vote on is that they will receive a 3 per cent overtime allowance, which will mean that that amount of money is now super-able, whereas under the current arrangement none of their overtime is super-able, so it is quite an attractive proposition. It works out to be a very similar amount of money if overtime was evenly distributed across staff. It is about the same amount of money that members of Parliament could sign off on — that discrete sort of amount that the Parliament has had. But, yes, what is on offer is the 3 per cent overtime allowance.

Mr SMITH — There are swings and roundabouts on this and winners and losers. In some cases where you might have an individual who works very little, they will be significantly — or maybe not significantly — better off. Some others, who may work extraordinary amounts of overtime, might feel that they are being deprived. There is also provision so that if you work in excess of 40 hours overtime in the cycle, you would get time off or the opportunity for time off in lieu. This is, again, a matter for the electorate officers to decide for themselves. Overall I am personally of the view it is an improvement for them.

Ms PENNICUIK — Are you saying, Speaker, that it is equivalent to 40 hours? Is that what you are suggesting?

Ms LINDELL — No.

Ms PENNICUIK — How many hours would it be equivalent to?

Ms LINDELL — It is equivalent to about 40 hours.

Ms PENNICUIK — Forty hours per year?

Ms LINDELL — The amount of money that Parliament had in its discrete amount that was in the last EBA — a \$365 000 allowance for overtime — when that was divided up into how much overtime each office could be paid without going into members' office budgets, that was about the amount. It was about an hour each week that staff could claim within the confines of that overtime amount that was in the EBA.

Mr SMITH — The other improvement is that it is superannuated, so you are going to be paid superannuation on your overtime component, which you never did.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes, President, I hear that. You mentioned, too, that it will differ in terms of advantage or disadvantage for some staff — and I would agree. Some staff may be prevented from working overtime due to family commitments, for example.

Mr SMITH — So they get 3 per cent, superannuated.

Ms PENNICUIK — Some staff may be then required to do more than 40 hours per year. If that were the case, will the MP be able to pay that staff from their electorate office budget for overtime?

Ms LINDELL — I would think so.

Mr SMITH — I do not know of any impediment, but there is also the time off in lieu.

The CHAIR — It does happen — salary supplementation.

Ms PENNICUIK — If it is in lieu, it may or may not be able to be taken?

Mr SMITH — Then you would have to manage that.

The CHAIR — They could take it out of their own pocket, too.

Mr SMITH — The office manager.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you, President. I am talking about a wider issue than my role as office manager.

Ms LINDELL — My understanding — and I have had some nods — is that the arrangement will stay, that staff will be able to be paid from the office budget. As it is now, extra overtime can be paid from the office budget.

The CHAIR — And some people pay for it from the member's — —

Mr NOONAN — That is in addition to leave replacement as well, is that correct?

Mr SMITH — Yes.

Mr NOONAN — And that will remain?

Mr SMITH — Yes.

The CHAIR — Just following up for clarification, that money which is available, people can also claim back vehicle expenses, can they not?

Ms LINDELL — That would be additional staff expenses.

Ms PENNICUIK — My last question on that: is that going to save the department money?

Ms LINDELL — No. There will be savings that the department has to find to fund the EBA, but we are confident that we can do that.

The CHAIR — I am sure you will find some productivity in order to fund it.

Ms LINDELL — We had to show that we could meet government wages policy and deliver the EBA as it is, so there are departmental savings.

Ms HUPPERT — I am aware there are a number of members who are currently without electorate offices and, I also understand, some who are at risk of being so in the near future. Could you please explain the reasons for this?

Ms LINDELL — Certainly. The provision of electorate offices is a very time-consuming and difficult jigsaw to put in place. There are some electorates that have very limited accommodation available. That is one problem; it often takes a long time to identify an appropriate office.

The second one, and probably an issue which is causing the most level of grief in that sense for Parliament, is that members would be aware that we do not own electorate offices; we lease them. We have an arrangement with the equal opportunity commission that when leases come up for renewal in offices that are not DDA compliant, we will negotiate with the landlord to make those offices compliant to the Disability Discrimination Act.

In one particular case we have had the landlord agree to do those works, the lease was renewed, but the landlord has failed to do the works in a compliant manner. The negotiations have gone on. There is very little that the Parliament can do, but we have actually vacated the office and are refusing to pay rent until the landlord comes forward with his side of the bargain. We have to do that. We have an agreement with the equal opportunity commission. We have taken the right legal steps with the landlords to address the works as they need to, but it is very difficult. We do not own these offices. We enter into leases in good faith. There is very little we can do in the end.

Those are some of the issues. I have been looking for an office for 12 months and have been unable to locate an office in my electorate.

The CHAIR — It is very difficult.

Ms LINDELL — It is very difficult at the moment.

Mr SMITH — Especially when they know that Parliament is looking for one — that really helps!

The CHAIR — That is right. I am due to change mine soon. I notice you going to do an environmental initiative in my refurbishments. You said there was none in your one there. There is one pilot project for lighting.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Can I take you to question 1.4 in the departmental response to the committee about the risks relating to budget estimates. The response is:

Parliament is not a service delivery government department and generates no income nor does it enter into major contracts, therefore there are no material risks ...

Can I just ask about the revenue that Parliament generates through functions and catering and so forth? How is that handled in terms of the appropriation? Does the Parliament retain that revenue? Also, with respect to major contracts such as the heritage works and, I assume, the IT, what are the Parliament's current exposures on major contracts?

Dr O'KANE — To deal with your second question first, the only really major contracts we have are the broadcasting ones and the heritage asset management strategy with the stoneworks you see around the building. Those are fairly extensively and exhaustively monitored. We have quite strong contractual arrangements in place; we put an extensive amount of time into selecting the contractors to undertake that work. We get regular progress reports on them, and I have to say that the quality of that work has been excellent to date.

It is one of the more difficult contracts to manage because it is an unknown, if you like. One of the difficulties with that particular contract is that we do not actually know until we get there what the fabric of the building is like, so we have had to do some destructive drilling in different parts of the building to see whether it is actually a facade of stone on the outside or it is structural — it is those sorts of issues. That is why we have broken the project up into stages. We carefully examine each stage and each block and replace that systematically. In terms of overall risk, that is the major one.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — And the Parliament carries all the risk of that project?

Dr O’KANE — Yes, it does, and we are managing it.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — You said broadcasting; what did you mean?

Dr O’KANE — That is the only other larger scale project.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The video broadcasting?

Dr O’KANE — Yes. It really turns on the definition of what is major. Major is viewed in the context of overall government definitions.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Material to the Parliament and the Parliament’s budget.

Dr O’KANE — Yes. The most material one is the heritage asset management and the stonework.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The other part of the question was about the revenue the Parliament generates through functions and catering et cetera.

Dr O’KANE — The activities of the catering area are really operated as a separate business unit and reported in the DPS Annual report. The whole purpose of catering really is to run it for the benefit of members, and functions simply offset that. So that is accounted for as a business unit, and I think I have given that response in previous years to the committee.

The CHAIR — Just to seek clarification on that, page 186 of budget paper 4 is followed by the comprehensive operating statement for the Parliament, so I assume that all the receipts are included in the operating statement and then the expenses from this business unit are expensed in the operating statement. I notice, for example, that you have nothing down in 2009–10 in terms of sale of goods and services. Maybe it is just so small it does not actually appear.

Dr O’KANE — I would have to get back to you on that particular one and give you the detail of it.

The CHAIR — It should appear in the total operating statement.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Can we just clarify how those receipts are treated — how the Treasurer treats them — for the Parliament?

Mr SCOTT — I note, Speaker, that in response to an earlier question and in your presentation you discussed the community engagement program. Could you please explain more about the community engagement and educational programs which will be run by the Parliament during the estimates period? I note that there was a series of educational DVDs created and that regional parliamentary information talks programs had been introduced. Could you explain what new programs and what activities are planned during the estimates period?

Ms LINDELL — There was a very recent review of the attendants’ roles in the Legislative Assembly. Coming from that there are some changes to take place with the tours — perhaps some growth in tours and perhaps some different tours that may come on board. We all know that we have fabulous work and furniture around the Parliament, and architecturally it is a wonderful building. The thoughts are that there is an opportunity there to expand those public tours in which people see the chambers, Queen’s Hall and the library but basically very little else.

We could engage members of the public who are more interested in different aspects of the Parliament and they would perhaps be able to come through and have a look at the particular architectural features, perhaps

some of the artwork, perhaps some of the heritage furniture that we can neither take off site nor use but which we decorate our halls with.

I might hand over to Ray in the sense that it is probably something he can talk to. I should say, though, that the DVDs have been very much appreciated by the schools. I think there is still a little bit of work that members of Parliament could do to get those DVDs out to the schools. They are all sent to schools, and the teachers who have seen and used them are very complimentary about the levels at which they are pitched and the simplicity with which the process of Parliament is explained.

The regional parliamentary information talks really try to take Parliament out to the regional areas as a complementary activity or a replacement activity for primary school children who do not or cannot get into Melbourne to the Parliament. They have been very well recommended. The attendants who conduct those talks have been trained to do so. It is an opportunity they certainly enjoy, rather than just their mundane jobs that occur while Parliament sits. There is another whole side to the attendants' positions that I think enhances their workplace. I will hand over to Ray.

Mr PURDEY — It is probably a little bit more than just the attendants. Our DPS education officer has drawn up a plan for the next three years. He works very closely with the education department in relation to the things that perhaps Parliament can do to meet the needs of some of the students and the VELS.

As part of the program that we are working on with the education officer we are hoping over the next period — we are looking ahead three years at the moment — to expand the information that our tour guides provide so that we can cover the year 12 legal studies curriculum and train our attendants up to be able to go out and speak to year 12 students and make sure they cover exactly the things that are on the VELS for that.

What Jenny was referring to in relation to our regional information talks is that at the moment we have started off in a small manner, and we have conducted probably about two or three of those. We hope to do four or five regional sessions a year. We go out and tell those areas well in advance that we are coming to a particular regional area. Usually it involves the education officer who contacts the schools in the area; they have an opportunity to put in a request to come to the centre and bring their students in to that centre to get similar types of presentations that schools get when they come here into the Parliament building.

In addition to that, the education officer also works with the law institute. The law institute does about four presentations a year, I think, in country areas. As part of the arrangements with the institute we assist in providing presentations into a session. I think their sessions run over about two or three days and we are involved in assisting them in doing presentations on parliamentary procedure.

Ms MUNT — Can we also get a program for the work experience students who come through our electorate offices?

The CHAIR — That is a good idea.

Mr PURDEY — Yes, that is right. Work experience students go through both electorate offices and here at Parliament itself. I must say members are always very good when we approach them. If we want work experience students to have contact with members of Parliament they are usually quite cooperative and will give of their time when students are in here on work experience programs, which is much appreciated.

Ms MUNT — But we need some structure and clarification on that.

The CHAIR — What do you want the education officer to do, draw up a bit of a program which might help?

Ms MUNT — That would be good — just issues like whether insurance covers work experience students while they are with you or travelling with you or in the car. There is a whole range of issues that really need to be clarified.

Dr O'KANE — We have also had some very positive feedback from some particular client target markets. The video that related to people from non-English-speaking backgrounds was a big hit. We have also had very positive responses back from TAFE and also from libraries, which is another interesting client group. We think it has hit the mark. It is actually good to do your market research and target those areas that we think have very

little knowledge about parliamentary procedure or parliamentary process. We are working quite well as a team to actually get that information out there.

Mr SMITH — I had an interesting request that I have not actually done anything about as yet in regard to DVDs from a major law firm who thought they could be very, very helpful in their people understanding how Parliament actually works and what it actually does. I thought that was quite interesting, and something we might have to have a good look at.

Mr SCOTT — You would hope that with a law degree you would know how the law was made.

The CHAIR — It might be a session in the articles course.

While we are still on the digital age, I notice in our last report that we did on the budget estimates for 2008–09 we had three recommendations, recommendation 47, 48 and 49, in respect of webcasting and videocasting. We made some recommendations which have been accepted in principle, or accepted by the government, presumably also — —

Mr WELLS — There is a big difference between ‘accept’ and ‘accept in principle’.

The CHAIR — It is a question about the effectiveness, and so it is a matter of actually following that one up. But you can read it here; I gave you a copy of the response.

Can you just tell us where this is at and how it is going? I notice, for example, when the budget was on, the feedback I got was that it was very difficult to follow it all, there was not a very strong signal or something. I am just wondering how you are going and when the webcasting is going to come through. What do you call it? The video stuff.

Mr SMITH — In terms of the audio, I have actually had reports from overseas from people who were listening online and were quite impressed with it.

Mr WELLS — What, listening to the budget?

Mr SMITH — No, this was prior to the actual budget. I am not sure whether people are aware but your photo will actually come up online if you are speaking, and it automatically jumps to the next member who is speaking, which I think is quite helpful when you audio broadcast. I have not actually heard anyone complain about the audio.

The CHAIR — Maybe it relates to the capacity they have got for listening to it.

Mr SMITH — Yes, but, as I say, your comment about some people having difficulties is the first I have heard of the problem.

Ms LINDELL — I did not receive any reports. There are occasions when we do have some sound problems. I did not receive a report this week that we had had some, but obviously once it leaves here it is out into the unknown a little bit so far as what is happening in the wider network that is not — —

The CHAIR — Sure. Anyway, the wider question is: how is it going, and when are we going to get the TV cameras? I am sure my deputy is very keen to be on the video.

Ms LINDELL — My wish is that by budget next year we are video webcasting, but some of these things are not in the total control of the Parliament. I think I will hand over to Stephen to walk through where the project is at and the stages that are yet to go.

The CHAIR — That is good because the government’s response is that the Assembly is scheduled for next financial year and the Council for 2010–11. That is the government’s response, but I am interested in where you guys are at.

Dr O’KANE — If I could just give the committee a bit of context to this. The project to broadcast parliamentary debates is a four-year plan that commenced over two years ago. There were a number of building blocks that were required as part of that process. The first one was the development of a stable Hansard IT environment, because that was not the situation that we had. We needed to upgrade the various Hansard systems

and procedures, as we have done with use of voice-activated technology and we have also modified the production system. We then did the recabling of the chambers in Parliament House and then we also, as part of that process, had to develop an audiovisual computer room and, as part of that, some uninterrupted power supplies.

What you can see in terms of these building blocks is that we have had to get the base infrastructure right first before we can actually move to the next step. The next stage is the replacement of the chamber sound systems to the state-of-the-art digital network. That has incorporated some of the features for future video broadcasting of Parliament. That has then moved on to the audio broadcasting of proceedings, which is where we are at the moment. That is using the Vividas system. There is currently one building block left to complete — that is, the replacement of the digital recording system — before the video broadcasting components are undertaken.

There have been a number of features of this. We have certainly learned a fair bit from the experiences of other parliamentary jurisdictions about that. It is interesting that we have followed this process, because the technology has significantly improved along the way.

The CHAIR — I am sure it has.

Dr O’KANE — It is now smaller and better, particularly the camera technology. We are continuing to learn about that from the other parliaments. Our target date for video broadcasting is May 2010, and we are pretty confident that we can get to that target; we have been working assiduously towards that.

As you can see, it has not been a matter of simply saying, ‘Let’s just grab a system off the shelf and do it’; it is actually all the support infrastructure for both houses, and we have decided to do that for both houses at the same time.

The CHAIR — Are they getting them both at the same time?

Dr O’KANE — No, the support infrastructure at the same time.

The CHAIR — I see, yes.

Dr O’KANE — Then the Assembly will come on first and then the Council, roughly in accordance with the timetable that you have suggested.

The CHAIR — In 2010–11, whatever it is, yes. Thank you very much.

Dr O’KANE — So it is a building block process.

The CHAIR — Yes, I understand. Do you want clarification on this?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Just a follow-up: does the Parliament have any statistics on the uptake of the audio feed — how many people are listening to it on an average sitting day, or any information like that?

Mr SMITH — It is on the internet.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yes, but is there a count of how many — —

Ms LINDELL — Yes, we do.

Dr O’KANE — I believe we do have that data.

Ms LINDELL — We do, but we would have to — —

Dr O’KANE — We would have to get some more information for you on that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Just for an indicative idea of how many people actually — —

The CHAIR — The number of ‘hits’ is the right word.

Mr SMITH — It depends on who is speaking.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yes, exactly. I said the average across the day, President.

Mr WELLS — This is in regard to the answers to the questions about asset funding. In relation to question 2.3 about the development of a master plan of the parliamentary area that has been put out to tender, can you outline for us what the time frame for that is with the master plan being accepted and when the funding discussions with the government are going to take place in regard to that master plan? What is the overall time frame for that?

Ms LINDELL — At the moment we are developing the master plan. I cannot give you any indication as to when discussions with government will take place. What we need to do as a Parliament is look at how it is that we sustain this building to be a parliamentary building for the next 150 years.

The master plan will incorporate the total rewiring, the total replumbing. We have front steps where water leaks down into offices. There are some big issues to be fleshed out in the master plan itself. I would have thought that we actually needed discussion around, 'If this building is not sustainable into the future, then what do we actually do?'. That is a discussion for the community of Victoria, not particularly a Parliament-to-government discussion. I see this as but the very beginning of a problem that, as a community, we are going to have to deal with. It will raise I think many more questions than it does answers. We hope to have the master plan by, I think, the end of this year?

Dr O'KANE — Yes; December, January — the master plan process is really to be completed by January 2010, but we are currently going through a consultation process which will take about 30 weeks, I think, was the time frame. We have engaged an architectural firm or consultancy by the name of Woodhead, who are doing that. They will be consulting all of the stakeholder groups around the Parliament to make sure that we get a sense of what people think about that.

It is very much the first stage of the process, and it is a very complex process. We have got all sorts of issues to do with things like identifying accommodation needs, benchmarks, sustainable management practice, the existing frameworks of things like the replacing and upgrading of mechanical, electrical, fire, hydraulics, security, car parking, and developing some sort of priority list for the future. Obviously based on that we would then apply for budget in the same way. But until we have the plan and a clear priority for that, then we would not approach government for that funding.

Mr WELLS — So apart from the, I guess, viability of the building as is, with major upgrades in maintenance, are you also looking at capital expansions on this particular site or building?

Dr O'KANE — I think the short answer to that is we don't know until the consultation takes place. Each of you, as MPs, will have certain preferences around accommodation and other things. We have got issues like the use of the site and the current location of existing facilities. One of the most difficult areas will be simply relocating services that are in the building to outside the building to try to create space — air-conditioning units and ducting and wiring and so on. So before you can even get to that sort of base point, we really need to understand all of that and how it best fits together and works well.

Mr SMITH — I want to make comments on two points. The consultation process will include everyone imaginable associated with the building, including the workforce, members et cetera, to get everyone's input. The second is there are no grandiose plans. I want to make it absolutely clear: domes, lions — that sort of stuff is not part of what we are talking about. Reading in the paper comments of \$151 million, or whatever, being talked about is just fanciful. God knows where that has come from; it has certainly come from no-one associated with this particular issue or proposal. We have no idea.

Ms MUNT — On page 265 in budget paper 3, listed under 'Significant challenges facing the Parliament in the medium term' it says, in part:

ensuring that the Parliament House remains a functional working location that is accessible to the public within security constraints ...

I think there is some thought of enhanced security measures being implemented in Parliament. Could you please explain what those enhanced security measures might be and how they would relate to keeping the Parliament a functional working and accessible location.

Ms LINDELL — There was a security vulnerability assessment completed in 2008. The findings and the recommendations of that assessment have been accepted and have been adopted by the presiding officers and the parliamentary executive group, and we are currently incorporating them into a security plan for the Parliament. I suppose there are a number of things: one is the basic physical infrastructure — what can we do to make the precinct more secure? There are some operational issues, but there are also some procedural issues as well.

One of the things about this Parliament, I suppose, is that it has always been a very accessible building, but in light of the security assessments that we have been given there have to be some changes, and those changes will have to be accepted by members of Parliament, members of the public and by the staff who work here as well.

To me, one of the most bizarre occurrences is when you arrive in the morning in a car, the gate arm comes up and you drive in. You drive in whether you are a member of Parliament or whether you are a bank robber, because there is no way to turn you away. So you come in, you come right up to the building and then you go on your merry way if in fact you are not allowed in. It is just not a secure environment that we are conducting business in.

We have nominated some priority infrastructure upgrades. We need, obviously, a new access control system whereby we do not allow people into the precinct in a vehicle that we do not want here. We need some CCTV and a lighting upgrade. We have some cameras; they are not actually movable and they fix on one spot, so if something is happening 2 metres off the spot, then we have no vision of it at all.

As I say, if you think of where our PSOs are based at the back door, we have an unsatisfactory environment where you have the attendants, the security scanning and the PSOs all in 2 square metres or 3 square metres, so we need to make some changes. We need a proper security control room. Those are the priority actions, and those projects are being scoped and prepared through DPS at the moment.

Mr SMITH — We have also got some enhanced or better security advisers. For example, one is an ex-captain of the UK marines.

The CHAIR — Do you mean the recent changes in the role of the Serjeant-at-Arms and the usher?

Mr SMITH — No, I am not talking about that. We have actually got some outside expert advice in now; an ex-captain of the British marines, an expert in security et cetera to advise and assess.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Who is in charge of security? Who in the Parliament is ultimately in charge of security? Is it the presiding officers or the Serjeant-at-Arms?

Mr SMITH — There is a specific role for both the Usher and the Serjeant in the chambers, and the Serjeant has a significant role in the Parliament. But ultimately, if you are talking about responsibility in the Parliament, it is the presiding officers. We also have a security unit now being developed over at parliamentary services.

Ms LINDELL — As we speak today, the security operations are being transitioned across from the Parliament — from the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod — to the wider parliamentary precinct and electorate offices security. So for the security on the grounds and at 55, and out in the electorate offices, there will be a consistency to all of that.

Obviously within the chamber it remains with the traditional Serjeant-at-Arms, and our privilege rights rest with the Serjeant-at-Arms, the Usher of the Black Rod and the presiding officers, but the broader security issues are being transitioned to DPS. I will hand over to Stephen, because he will have much more detail.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I just want to clarify that. In the chamber, security is the responsibility of the Usher, so if I am in the visitors gallery — recently there were those issues when we had abuse upstairs — who has responsibility for that? I think there was some confusion, as the President might recall, in terms of who had responsibility to remove them.

Mr SMITH — I was not confused.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I think members were.

The CHAIR — Stephen, could you answer that?

Dr O’KANE — If it is in the precinct of the chamber, as in that situation, it will be those chamber officers, so it will be the Usher or the Serjeant. If it is outside of that area, it will transition across to me.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So upstairs is not the chamber?

Mr SMITH — No, it is not considered the chamber in terms of describing the actual chamber. In terms of members, it is on the floor.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes, and that is what I am getting at.

Mr SMITH — And that is the usher’s.

Mr WELLS — Is it the same in the Assembly, Ray? In regard to the visitors gallery, is that outside the chamber?

Mr PURDEY — The galleries are the responsibility of the presiding officers when we are meeting, and so they would give directions. So that would be under the direction of the — —

Mr DALLA-RIVA — PSOs?

Mr PURDEY — Yes, it is under the direction of the PSOs, but the Serjeant or the Usher would work with those officers in relation to the galleries when a direction is given by a Presiding Officer.

Dr O’KANE — They are on the scene and the closest to make the call in relation to that.

The CHAIR — And in terms of committee hearings, which of course attract privilege within the precinct of the committee hearing?

Mr PURDEY — The building outside the chambers is going to be looked after by the unit in Stephen’s area, so it would be his staff that would respond to those things.

Ms LINDELL — But it is the same staff.

The CHAIR — Yes, I know; I understand that.

Ms LINDELL — The PSOs and security staff are the same staff, but within the chambers the presiding officers need to empower people to take action.

Dr O’KANE — There are many other elements to security, as I have outlined before. There are public and private areas. We are not trying to create Fortress Parliament; we are trying to create an environment where people can work safely. That is the intention of all of us, and we meet together regularly on those sorts of issues. We have got very good support from Victoria Police in those areas. As we do our security assessments and we upgrade our capital works, particularly some of those projects like CCTV, we will gradually get into a position which is much tighter than we are now, without trying to reduce the flexibility.

Ms MUNT — Will the temporary facility come under this security review as well as the main building? There are some issues of vulnerability out there, I think.

Ms LINDELL — The temporary facility raises a number of issues that will certainly be canvassed in the precinct master plan, but it does offer particular security problems, as do other places within the Parliament. Perhaps I need to put on record that members need to take some responsibility for the security of their own offices. Many are left unlocked, not just in the temporary facility but also in the Parliament building itself, but in the temporary facility blinds are left open, lights are left on and laptops are left on desks. It does not assist. We can put in place extra patrols and extra CCTV cameras, but if people are not going to take responsibility, it is very, very difficult for any staff and any system to actually be totally secure.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that.

Ms PENNICUIK — You mentioned the program with Sustainability Victoria, which was also mentioned in hearings last year. I am assuming that you have now had a chance to evaluate water and energy usage, so my question is: have there been any substantial savings in this regard in the department and the parliamentary precinct, and what part of the budget will be put towards water, energy and other resource efficiency measures?

Ms LINDELL — The Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Council and DPS have put an amount of money towards some of the sustainability issues. Where we are really with it at the moment, though, is that we actually want to make sure that through the master plan process we have the infrastructure looked at through sustainable eyes and that as much as possible be put into the plans going forward so that it is built in — we are not actually trying to adapt and retrofit. That is, I suppose, to me the most positive step in that changes we plan to make will really embed sustainability into them.

We certainly did participate in the pilot round of ResourceSmart, which looked at Parliament developing an environment management system, which I was very pleased to see, because it was a recommendation in a report from the Environment and Natural Resources Committee in 2005, which I chaired. It was one of those recommendations that Parliament should have an environment management system, so it was terrific to be able to carry that report forward, I suppose, into the Parliament.

ResourceSmart is a program run from Sustainability Victoria for those smaller government agencies to look at how they can improve their environmental footprint. We looked at energy consumption, water consumption, waste management, purchasing policies, staff participation and just broader environmental impacts. We now have a sustainability framework that the Parliament adopted in August 2008. Insofar as energy consumption is concerned, we actually do now have the ability to measure and to monitor our electricity consumption at all Parliament sites. We have initiated energy audits with RMIT masters students.

We have a relamping program in Parliament. We have changed our cooling and heating practices, and we have, I suppose, really seen some high energy efficiency purchases of our IT equipment so that our PCs use approximately 57 per cent — that is an exact number for an approximation — less power than our old PCs. The IT reduction of CO₂ emissions has been measured. We have seen a reduction over 200 000 kilograms of CO₂ emissions just through our IT, and we have seen electricity savings of over 25 000 watts.

Overall — I think this is the nub of your question — we have achieved a 17 per cent reduction in electricity usage in the first year — that is, the first quarter of 2007 compared to the first quarter of 2008. Electricity consumption has been steady since then, but we know that as we improve our infrastructure we will make more gains, and of course Parliament House purchases 100 per cent green electricity and has done so since 1 July 2008. Our water consumption — firstly, we are able to measure it. We have a water map of our total use.

We had a reduction of 8.4 per cent in 2007–08. We have had a further 5.2 per cent decrease. . We do mainly use recycled water. All our water in the gardens is recycled or is from the storage tanks that we have, and 55 St Andrews Place has all waterless urinals and recycled water for toilet flushing. Do you have a total water use —

Dr O’KANE — I do not have an exact number on the water use. I think what we have highlighted is it has really been quite a difficult task, but we have actually made a considerable amount of progress. For example, Parliament House does not lend itself to any kind of efficiency in terms of environmental performance, yet at 55 St Andrews Place we have got a 4.5-star green rating. Overall I think we have done pretty well, but it is something that we continue to work on, and I think we are getting better at it. The feedback I have had from other parliamentary jurisdictions is that they are the same; they are all working towards those targets as well.

Ms PENNICUIK — Just to follow-up, I understand that it has to fit into the master plan et cetera, and obviously that is a good thing, but I am just wondering about retrofitting. You were saying you do not want to retrofit ahead of that, but, for example, there are in this building toilets that are not dual flush. Is there any plan to retrofit those in the meantime?

Ms LINDELL — I thought they were all dual flush.

The CHAIR — Must be in the ladies.

Ms PENNICUIK — I do not go into the male toilets.

Mr WELLS — No, in the ladies.

Ms PENNICUIK — Let’s talk about that later.

Ms LINDELL — Okay.

Ms PENNICUIK — Is there short-term retrofitting like that? I mean, that would make substantial savings.

Ms LINDELL — Certainly within the building as we go through on general maintenance — all the new lighting — we make those changes where we possibly can. I was fairly sure that all the toilets were dual flush, but we will have another inspection. That is a very easy thing that we can do.

Ms PENNICUIK — All that information that you gave us, is that available?

The CHAIR — I think you normally report that as part of the annual report and our questionnaires. I know we did not cover it specifically in our financial and performance outcomes; we covered the large departments.

Ms LINDELL — But we are quite happy to report it — —

The CHAIR — It would be great if you could.

Ms LINDELL — In fact on our open day in November we had some signs around the building that gave what our power and water use were.

The CHAIR — And we will look to report that in next year's performance outcomes report.

Ms MUNT — Before we finish, could I congratulate the Parliament and the presiding officers for starting this process. I know it is not easy with a building as old as this one to try to implement these systems and get things under way, so thank you.

Ms LINDELL — Can I say it is particularly difficult in a climate where every dollar that gets spent on Parliament is viewed via the media as a dollar being spent on members of Parliament. It is a very difficult balance to get where we have staff who are dedicated to preserving and making the very best of this building as a workplace and as a major historical building of great significance to the people of Victoria when programs that are for this building and the sustainability of this building into the future are politicised and cheapened by throwaway lines about all this money to improve the lives of members of Parliament.

The CHAIR — Yes, thank you for that. There is a mythology out there. We had some visitors just the other day who were professionals and they commented on the simplicity, to use a neutral word, of the conditions in which the members and people work in this building.

Mr NOONAN — I refer to budget paper 3, pages 268 and 269, which list your security audit requirements on both the Council and the Assembly, with targets of '2'. We had a couple of pieces of contentious legislation last year which attracted a fair bit of public interest. I just wonder whether or not you could talk us through what the Parliament did to prepare for that in terms of attendants and other people responsible for security, and by extension take that to electorate offices? Clearly there is a much broader network of electorate offices.

Recently I triggered a security audit of my own office, which was a very satisfactory experience, because one of my staff was threatened by someone who walked in off the street. A number of changes will be made to our front entrance at the office as a result and also some security lighting at the back of our office. We were also notified of some measures to be taken to register online some issues relating to activities at electorate offices of a security nature. I just wonder whether they could be outlined for us.

Ms LINDELL — I will make some brief comments and then perhaps hand to Stephen. There is a significant amount of work being done by security and the electorate properties unit around a systematic approach, I suppose, to security both here and in the electorate offices. A new database will be online very soon which will ask staff to log all security incidences as they know them to be in the electorate offices.

That will be a very simple Lotus Notes form, with time, date, what happened et cetera. That will come straight through and then be rated and assigned as appropriate. That will give the Parliament then the ongoing information we need to know about trends that are happening. As you say, we have got electorate offices all over the state and we need to be able to analyse some of the increased risk, I suppose, and weight that. That database I think is — —

Dr O'KANE — It is actually developed now, and we are entering a year's worth of data in there, going back, to establish all of the trends that relate to the Parliament, reported incidents and so on. It is, again, helping us in more detailed planning for security.

Ms LINDELL — Could I say, once again, it is around behaviour and adapting to change. There is some resistance from members of Parliament to having secure interfaces put in their offices, to having secure interview rooms. The Parliament does what we believe we have to do. In any refurbishment, we install an interview room that does not have access back into the office, so that staff can remain secure. Some members of Parliament, though, choose not to use those as interview rooms. The Parliament cannot and will not go out and tell members of Parliament how and where they should put their equipment. Once again, it is a balanced program. I suppose in our electorate offices it is our staff that are compromised, and for those reasons alone, the Parliament has a responsibility to provide a safe workplace. But we do need support from members. External lighting, all of those sorts of things, will help to alleviate concerns.

Mr SMITH — There are a couple of points I would make. You asked a couple of questions. Both the Speaker and I have been privy to a presentation of the new incident reporting method. I have to say it is quite comprehensive and I think very professional and will improve dramatically all of these sorts of issues.

Correct me if I am wrong, but one of your initial questions was what did we do in terms of preparation for those incidents last year which it may have been obvious would occur, with the abortion and ART bills in particular. From my perspective, I did talk to the PSOs in particular and advised them that I wanted extra security in the gallery, because you did not have to be clever to work out that they were going to be quite contentious issues. That went reasonably well, I thought. Maybe we can learn from that to improve it.

One thing in particular, though, that quite disturbed me, which I have addressed but have not yet come to some position that would alleviate it, was the issue of ex-premiers and their vulnerability in those sorts of circumstances. In our gallery we had two lifelong opponents on the particular issue sitting opposite each other and treating each other with great respect. When the ex-Premier left, unfortunately, and unbeknownst to me at the time, she was confronted by three men in a very hostile manner and was very, very vulnerable — not only because of her own physical stature now but because she had no protection whatsoever, which made me think that we ought to have a system that recognises that when people of importance come to the Parliament in these times we need some extra personal security.

It is a matter of judgement as to when you would do that. For instance, if we are having the unveiling of the Premier's portrait, you would not expect that to be contentious or attract some sort of protest or whatever, so you would probably not be as alert. But certainly when those sorts of bills on very contentious social matters are being dealt with in the Parliament, we should be more alert to that possibility. So we are conscious of that, and I think we all learnt something from those particular instances.

Ms LINDELL — If I could just add to that — I did not address that in my response either way. I apologise for that. In normal day-to-day sitting day demonstrations often it is a fight for a spot to demonstrate on the front steps, but for all of that there is a process that members probably do not see or do not realise is happening in the background. Risks are assessed and we have a system of managing who comes into the gallery. Members had to be reminded of that earlier in this particular Parliament, but there is a process in place. It is kept, I suppose, behind the scenes for obvious reasons. Really, as much as possible life within this building is made as easy as possible for members of Parliament, but a lot of work does happen in the background to ensure that that is the case.

Dr O'KANE — If I could just reassure members. I meet with Inspector Geoff Darlison from Victoria Police, who oversees the security intelligence group and also the PSOs both here and on the Treasury Reserve. If there are any special responses that are required, they are proceeded with through that mechanism.

The one issue I would follow up on in terms of reinforcing what the Speaker said is that one difficulty we do have is individual offices not doing alarm testing. The alarm testing process is in place to protect members and staff in electorate offices, and that is an issue that we constantly have to reinforce.

The CHAIR — I want to be fair to everybody, so Mr Dalla-Riva can ask the final question.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Last question: earlier you mentioned electorate officers being DDA-compliant. I understand there was some initial work undertaken in terms of the upper house refurbishment, given the lower house had refurbishment, in particular lighting, accessibility, seating and the like. The upper house has got a say in terms of the lighting, which is atrocious, and the conditions, in particular the seating and how that is going to be DDA-compliant in terms of moving to the future. I just want to get an update as to where that is. Is it within

the master plan consideration or has it been dropped off the list? If so, what are we doing in terms of some of the short-term things that need to be corrected, as I have outlined?

Mr SMITH — I put in some new carpet in there, you may have noticed.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I could not see it; it was too dark!

The CHAIR — It came out of the chookhouse!

Mr SMITH — I jest, but I should not, because the fact is the lighting does not meet the Australian safety standards. That is understood. All of the issues have been dealt with, with a proposal to go forward. It is simply a matter of getting the actual finances, if you like, for that to happen and have a program to meet it. But it has not been dropped off, if you like. It is separate to the master plan at the moment. The point is valid, in particular the ergonomics of the seating. By any stretch — the chair made comment earlier about the working conditions within the building — it is minimal. It is pretty basic.

The CHAIR — Simple.

Mr SMITH — Simple, yes, that is the word. But, more importantly, the access for people with disabilities et cetera is a very important issue. There is a plan as to how to reconfigure to allow that. All we need is a member with a disability in the future, and we have got a problem. It is clearly understood and we are working on it.

The CHAIR — I know Mr Noonan wanted to follow up, but he can do that in writing, and we will send you a follow-up to that one in writing. We allow that.

That concludes the presentation of the budget estimates for the portfolios of the parliamentary departments. I note in terms of that particular act, we have not had the Auditor-General come to us. We should probably do that next year and have him come before us in respect of his estimates in the future.

I thank the presiding officers and departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been quite a comprehensive session. Where questions were taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. We request that written response to those matters be provided within 30 days. Thank you very much.