

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2011–12

Melbourne — 9 May 2011

Members

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Mr P. Davis

Ms J. Hennessy

Mr D. Morris

Mr D. O'Brien

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Witnesses

Mr K. Smith, MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,

Mr B. Atkinson, MLC, President of the Legislative Council,

Mr R. Purdey, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly,

Mr W. Tunnecliffe, Clerk of the Legislative Council, and

Mr P. Lochert, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services.

The CHAIR — Welcome. I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2011–12 budget estimates for the parliamentary departments. On behalf of the committee I welcome the Honourable Ken Smith, MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Honourable Bruce Atkinson, MLC, President of the Legislative Council, Mr Ray Purdey, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Wayne Tunnecliffe, Clerk of the Legislative Council and Mr Peter Lochert, Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services. Members of Parliament, departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public that they cannot participate in any way in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers as requested by the minister or his or her chief of staff, as relevant, can approach the table during the hearing to provide information by leave of myself as the chairman. Written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room. No more than two TV cameras are allowed at any one time in the allocated spaces. Given that we have no TV cameramen, I am not going to remind them of anything. I am also pleased to announce that this series of budget estimates hearings is being audiocast live on Parliament's website.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. This committee had determined that there is no need for evidence to be sworn. However, witnesses are reminded that all questions must be answered in full and with accuracy and truthfulness. Any persons 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. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days of this hearing. Unverified transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will be placed on the committee's website immediately following receipt, to be replaced by verified transcripts within 48 hours after the hearing.

Following a presentation by the presiding officers, committee members will ask questions relating to budget estimates generally. The procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly, but evidently there will be some differences, I suspect.

I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off or at least to silent.

I now call on the presiding officers to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes on the more complex financial performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolios of parliamentary departments. Welcome.

Mr ATKINSON — Thank you. Good morning. I do not intend to dwell on the submission that we have provided in so much as you have had the opportunity to read it, so I guess what we will probably do is go to a couple of the — —

The CHAIR — Sorry, President, members of the committee received this briefing as they arrived for the — —

Mr ATKINSON — This morning.

The CHAIR — This morning, so if you want to speak to it, you are quite welcome

Mr ATKINSON — All right. A lot of it is fairly self-evident anyway, so it still applies, but I will bear that in mind.

Basically the presentation covers four areas of parliamentary activity: the Department of Parliamentary Services and the two respective houses — the departments that control those houses and the joint investigatory committees. Sheet no. 3 goes into budget allocations and comparison between 2010–11 and 2011–12. It will be noted that there is a slight increase for the year ahead. For that we are grateful to the government, the

Department of Treasury and Finance, for their recognition of a submission that we made for further funding for the continuation of the stonework repairs. There is also about \$400 000 general increase in that amount as well.

Basically, in terms of key achievements for the previous year, I think that the main issue of the last year was obviously the conduct of the election, which had significant ramifications for the Parliament and its officers. There was a significant change of membership of the Parliament and each of those changes of member requires quite an extensive range of work to be done in terms of changes to their offices, the fixing of computer systems and even to the extent of training of a lot of new staff and so forth, so there was a very significant component associated with that.

On the opening, the 57th Parliament was also opened with a very short lead time. I am not sure how we overcome that. I do not know that there is a possibility of overcoming that if a government is keen to establish its arrangements before a Christmas period, because given a 27 November election or even if you cribbed a few days with that last Saturday in November in another election year, you still have three to four weeks before the writs are returned and you know who is actually a member of the Parliament. It is a very short time frame in which to organise the opening, but that went very well.

You will note that the webcasting occurred for the opening ceremony and has subsequently continued in the Legislative Council, as it already had been doing in the Legislative Assembly.

There has been further work on the department's master precinct plan as well, and certainly significant works undertaken on the stonework restoration project. No doubt we might well come back to that in some of the discussion today.

The Parliament has a number of key challenges, and I think probably a lot of the challenges actually do relate to the building. It is a heritage precinct and we are as Victorians very proud of this building. As a workplace it is a difficult environment and has significant challenges for all of those people who work within it. We have certainly faced all of the problems associated with a 150-year-plus building in terms of its maintenance demand, which has included things like the fire services, lighting, switchboards, and obviously the stonework is a very evident project. But indeed there are others that as presiding officers we have concerns about, which include the front steps that really do need to be redone. They are a significant factor in terms of the water features that some members' offices have beneath the Spring Street steps.

There are also some challenges for the Parliament, and particularly the Legislative Council, in terms of meeting some of our responsibilities with the resourcing of the legislative committee structure that has been established. There are also a number of challenges for us in terms of security of the building and general issues that are often mentioned in dispatches by members, including the running of the restaurant and dining room facilities.

In particular I might just highlight on the next slide the middle block of pointed items, which includes the obsolete infrastructure like sewerage, plumbing, electricity and ventilation and the obsolete fire detection system, which in fact was non-functional for four weeks in 2010 and relied on us getting spare parts from the Supreme Court, which changed its fire protection system in order that we might have effective fire warning coverage.

There are also sections of stone falling from the building which presents a major occupational health and safety risk. The Speaker and I have both been up to the top of the scaffolding and looked at parts of the brickwork and some of it is almost like honeycomb — some of it is almost sand — because the water has got in over an extended period and there have been different penetration levels to the roofline which has allowed water to travel into that brickwork. We have had some significant issues there.

In terms of doing the repair work, there are a limited number of artisans available to actually do the work and who can maintain both the integrity and meet the aesthetic and heritage value of the building. I think we have been fairly well served by the contractor who has completed the work to date, but that has been a significant issue.

The water penetration is actually evident in this room. Members who have been in here before might recall that there are usually some very significant paintings from the National Gallery behind the presiding officers which would probably help you in our more boring moments, but on this occasion — —

The CHAIR — Never. Sorry to interject, President, but there would never be a boring moment.

Mr ATKINSON — They have been removed by the National Gallery because there was water penetration into this room which narrowly missed those paintings. The National Gallery was very concerned about its assets. Indeed the cost of having those paintings here is quite considerable and we certainly do not want to be running into insurance problems with those paintings as well. So that is an indication of the extent of water penetration.

As I said, we have some funding for the next stage of the brickwork. I am obviously not going to describe each of these pages but a number of them show some of the work that has been done. This particular slide details the funding process and reflects work completed and work continuing. The funding process has consisted of allocations from the Department of Treasury and Finance with regard to submissions we have made, and in some cases a draw-down from Parliament's depreciation funding as well.

Mr Chairman, I think that probably concludes my statement, except for the last page of the presentation which refers to our priorities for the year ahead. These include the replacement of the fire detection system, which is rather antique. Also included are the replacement of non-compliant switchboards and, as I have already indicated, the continuation of the stonework restoration. We are now up to stage 5. Are there eight stages or nine?

Mr LOCHERT — At the moment there are eight.

Mr ATKINSON — There are eight stages at this point. The Speaker and I have asked for a scoping of the cost and scale of works which would be required to repair the front steps to ensure that they do not continue to leak water. There is also some work to be undertaken in the Legislative Council chamber with regard to lighting.

We have some additional demands with webcasting. Members are keen to see that facility extended and used to good effect in their electorates, but we have some constraints in terms of the funding as to how far we can go with those facilities. The final point is the adequate resourcing of the legislative committee structure.

The CHAIR — Thank you, President. We now have the opportunity for questions. We have about 1^{1/4} hours available to us. Everybody will have their turn. What I would like to do in order to be constructive is that if members have a question on a particular theme perhaps we can deal with such issues in a block. For example, I am aware that a couple of members have raised an interest in exploring issues relating to the heritage precinct master plan and the maintenance and integrity of the building. So if members could just indicate if they want to jump in on some of those issues.

I will start by just trying to tease out for clarification what is intended with webcasting. You have touched on webcasting a couple of times in your presentation. We were hopeful of having a full webcast of the estimates hearings this year, and that was not possible for some technical reason. Although we are doing audiocasting we are pretty keen to see estimates and all of the other parliamentary committees webcast in full. Would you just clarify for us when webcasting will be available?

Mr ATKINSON — Mr Lochert? As you are aware, essentially the Legislative Council has only just commenced with webcasting in this current session of Parliament. The facilities were only installed just prior to the opening of Parliament on 21 December. It is the intention to provide facilities to other rooms that are used by committees.

Mr SMITH — If you go over to 55 St Andrews Place there are a number of committee rooms that already have cameras installed. Testing is being undertaken at the moment. It is a little difficult in here, apart from bringing in portable cameras, to have any sort of fixed cameras in this room. One would have hoped that there may well have been some cameras here so that this could have been webcast, but unfortunately not.

Mr ATKINSON — I think we are also mindful of the facilities in terms of the use of this building by the Senate and sometimes other parliaments for inquiries. I think the facilities are important, but it is a matter of actually staging that program. Mr Lochert, do you wish to make some comment on that too?

Mr LOCHERT — It is mainly at the moment a question of where we are in the project as a whole. The project had three main components. One was to get the audio webcasting for the Assembly, Council and committees in that order, and then video webcasting for the Assembly, Council and committees. The third, and I suppose last, stage is to work on the storage and retrieval of a lot of that material that is being recorded. Where we are at the moment is that we have completed the audio webcasting facilities for all those three, we have completed the video webcasting only for the Assembly and the Council, we have not yet finished all the infrastructure for the committees. You may recall that the opening of the 57th Parliament was actually video webcast, and we were working quite hard to just make that deadline in terms of both the technical but also the procedural elements in how we manage the webcasting of proceedings. There is quite a bit of work that goes on in the background as to what is appropriate to webcast, how you use the cameras, the kinds of shots you put out there and what elements of the proceedings get webcast and recorded.

The CHAIR — As a follow-up question, you indicated that you are starting to develop some work on recording and retrieving and saving material. I know it is a frustration for many members that at the present time we just do not have an archive. When is that part of the project likely to be complete?

Mr ATKINSON — We did not receive the funding from the Department of Treasury and Finance to actually undertake that archiving aspect of the project. A lot of this work is being done with contract staff, and we have developed it to the point of our resources to this stage. The archiving has a fairly substantial cost, and I guess there are parameters to be determined in terms of exactly how much archiving you do and how many products, if you like, you are prepared to provide from that archive service. In other words, if members want to use speeches and in terms of the extent to which the media has access to archived material, there is a substantial cost in retrieving some of that. There are a number of issues to be determined, but certainly the budget allocation that we sought to extend that archiving was not successful.

Mr SMITH — Can I just say we have made some effort to be able to record and distribute out to new members copies of their inaugural speeches, but that has to all be done by hand, if I can put it that way. We have also done the same with the different parties being able to have question time made available. Once again it is all done by a person sitting there doing it by hand. It is not able to be recorded and kept for too long, because we do not have the available space to do that. But most certainly our ultimate achievement is to be able to archive it and do what we do as far as the printed speeches are concerned, being able to get them out of *Hansard* and look at those wherever we are. We are hoping that in the future when there is enough money available, we are going to in fact be able to do that as far as the members and the public are concerned.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Speaker. Deputy.

Mr PAKULA — Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR — Sorry, I just assumed — are you moving on from webcasting?

Mr PAKULA — I am moving on from webcasting.

The CHAIR — Is there anybody else?

Mr MORRIS — Just a quick one, if I could, Speaker and President. I understand that a stream is available to the media, and certainly on one of the last editions of *Stateline* there were quite a few shots that showed the quality of the feed that is available. I am just wondering why that feed could not simply be extended to members and then allow us to deal with the manual aspects of the process the Speaker referred to.

Mr ATKINSON — There are a couple of issues. One of them is actually the usage protocols. If you allow external parties to capture the material that is broadcast and then use it at a subsequent time, then there are some real issues for us in how it is actually used. The media as part of the agreement for it to access that material is constrained in the method or amount of use that it can make with it. We would be concerned for instance if some of the material ended up in political advertising down the track. If members had an opportunity to capture it, it is possible that it could end up on blog sites, in political advertising, in other areas which did not reflect well on the Parliament and may well in that reflection be a matter of something that has been taken completely out of context. There are some real issues in terms of how we manage those protocols. We are open to looking at those, because clearly as a Parliament we believe that we should be open and transparent, and members certainly have an interest in accessing some of that material and using it for quite legitimate purposes so we are

keen to have that sort of discussion and move down that track, but it is important for us to make sure that we do it properly.

The CHAIR — Thank you, President. Anything further on webcasting?

Mr O'BRIEN — Just one, Chair. Thank you, Speaker and President. Just in relation to the commonwealth Parliament's broadcasting, I note that that is obviously extensively shown on the ABC. I do not know the licensing arrangements there, whether there is a budgetary amount sent back to the commonwealth Parliament for that. Could a similar system be used for obviously lesser captures in relation to the Victorian Parliament? As part of that, in terms of the protocols, if a protocol has been developed for the media, surely a protocol could also be developed for members of Parliament similar to the existing protocols about quoting *Hansard* et cetera before it is verified and maybe only showing your speeches or whatever.

Mr ATKINSON — We do not disagree with the fact that a protocol could be worked out. There are financial constraints as well; it is more than one issue that we are dealing with. In terms of the federal government, I am not sure what their arrangements are with the media. I would certainly love their budget to run a suitable facility because I am sure it makes ours look rather mean and lean. I guess we are not really selling the Greg Norman story, so I am not sure the media is going to rush to try to pay and therefore subsidise our facility, but nevertheless this is an area that we are prepared to progress in discussions.

Mr PAKULA — Speaker, I just want to ask you about the Mitcham electorate office. I understand that the new member, Dee Ryall, was allowed to not take possession of a perfectly functional electorate office that, I think, has been the electorate office for that electorate for something like 30 years, and that she was allowed to, or the Parliament broke the lease that had a couple of years to run. I suppose I am wondering: is that the case? If so, why was it allowed to occur, and what is the sort of financial impact for the Parliament in allowing her to not take possession of that office?

Mr SMITH — The standard of the office was not suitable for a member. It was the electorate office of Tony Robinson, who was the gaming minister. When we looked at the office the standard was certainly not suitable — —

Mr PAKULA — It had not been a problem for Tony.

Mr SMITH — No, it may not have been a problem for Tony, but it certainly was a problem for our people when they went out to look at the office when the issue was raised by the current member for Mitcham as to the standard of the office, the floor, the broken walkways and the difficulties so far as being able to function in the office. It was badly laid out, there was a problem so far as parking was concerned, and I am just trying to remember any other difficulties.

Mr ATKINSON — Disabled access.

Mr SMITH — Parliamentary Services did not consider the office to be suitable for a member of Parliament. Under the lease we had a right to opt out of the current lease that was there, as we did with most offices — not all of them but most of them — where there is a one-month period after an election for the incoming member to be able to say whether they do or do not want a particular office. We were advised by the current member for Mitcham that she did not believe the office was suitable for her, and when we went out to review it, it was not seen to be suitable.

Mr ATKINSON — Can I just say also that it is not a matter of just the choice of the member. Indeed, this office had previously been occupied by another minister, who was a minister in a Liberal, or coalition, government during the Kennett years — —

Mr PAKULA — Minister Pescott.

Mr ATKINSON — Pescott.

Mr PAKULA — Yes.

Mr ATKINSON — In both cases — when he occupied it and when Tony Robinson occupied it — they did not go to the office because they were ministers and they had other facilities they relied on — —

Mr PAKULA — Tony was only a minister from 2007.

Mr ATKINSON — They were with other facilities. The building would have required substantial upgrade. It actually did not meet our security requirements, and it did not meet our disabled access requirements either. It was an extraordinarily difficult office to provide any sort of community access to, as Ken said, with parking. It was right on a very busy roundabout and a rather dangerous intersection. The decision was not made by the member for Mitcham; the decision was actually an objective analysis of that office. This is not an office that a decision was made on in isolation. The entire portfolio of offices that the Parliament operates is assessed and reviewed on a periodic basis. Some of them are upgraded; many of them are actually relocated, and they are relocated because they are inappropriate to the needs of both the Parliament in terms of having its representation through its members and also to meeting requirements in regard to security and disabled access.

Mr PAKULA — Just to follow up, and can I say that I am well aware of the issues with disabled access, security and parking because I had an office in Ballarat Street, Yarraville, that had no parking, no disabled access and what you would describe as tacked-on security measures at the end, but the lease was allowed to expire before the Parliament moved me out of there.

The problem as I understand it with the decision that has been made in regard to the Mitcham office is that it is already difficult for the Parliament to lease buildings because that clause exists which says the lease can be broken at an election or at a redistribution. But the Parliament has always been able to say to prospective lessors that that clause has never been used. As I understand it, this is the first time it has ever been used, and I suppose the query it raises in my mind is: now that the Parliament can no longer say, 'We have never used this clause', how much cost is that going to add to the leasing of buildings in the future? How much more difficult is it going to make it to lease buildings in the future, and what happens the next time after the next election, when members come to whoever the presiding officers are and say, 'I do not want my office anymore. I know I am still in a lease but I want to move'? I just do not know why the lease was not allowed to expire rather than creating this precedent which is now going to have repercussions for the Parliament.

Mr ATKINSON — A lot of the question you put is hypothetical. It really is not possible for us to quantify some of the aspects that you raise. But that clause is a feature of quite a number of our leases, as you rightly imply, and it was invoked on this occasion because of the adequacy of the facilities. There were a number of other members who also sought relocation following the election, if possible using the similar clause, and in each of those cases it was not appropriate that those changes be made at that time. This was based very much on the specific case that existed. I do not believe that that clause is indeed our major constraint in terms of negotiating suitable premises going forward. I think that there are other issues that actually make it more difficult for us to find space, and not the least of those is market rents and the configuration of offices that we need that provide an opportunity for us to have adequate security and access.

Mr SCOTT — Just following up — what will be the cost to the Parliament going forward of these changed arrangements at the Mitcham office?

Mr SMITH — I do not know. We would have to get back to the committee with an answer on the cost of it.

Mr PAKULA — Could you do that — just the cost of it?

Mr SMITH — Yes, certainly.

The CHAIR — Anything further on electorate officers before we move on to the next subject?

Ms HENNESSY — Just perhaps to clarify, Chair, that there were no further leases broken after the 2010 election?

Mr ATKINSON — That is right.

Mr PAKULA — That was the only one, okay.

Mr O'BRIEN — Just in relation to those security and access requirements, are you able to elaborate on what those access arrangements are, in relation particularly to the costs of them and of security and the difficulty in finding offices — what sorts of issues are involved? I would be happy if the secretary would be able to assist in providing this information.

Mr ATKINSON — Essentially, wherever possible, we would like in all cases to have a situation where there is a front door and a back door so that there is an escape route, if you like, in the consequence of a fire or perhaps some activity at the front of the office that stops people from safely exiting that office. That is the first thing. That seems like a fairly easy thing to achieve, but it is not always in commercial buildings. Not all commercial buildings, particularly of the size we are looking at, offer that opportunity. We are certainly looking at things like the lighting, where the building is in terms of having some sort of visibility or exposure to the street so that you are not tucked down a little dark alley, which creates some other issues. In some cases the Parliament has had to have a look at the proximity of parking to offices and how that parking space is lit and what opportunity there is for a member to get into some difficult because of parking facilities. Then obviously within the building itself the Parliament has a regime of security requirements that it looks to implement in those offices. In some offices it is fairly straightforward because of the configuration of the building, and in other offices it actually becomes quite an expensive exercise because the building shape is such that it is difficult to achieve that secure environment.

Mr ANGUS — Thank you, Speaker and President. Just getting back to the repairs and maintenance work being done on the building, I am wondering whether you could please elaborate for the committee, given the substantial cost involved, just the project management and governance structure surrounding that particular project?

Overheads shown.

Mr ATKINSON — The Parliament invested in a master precinct plan, which in fact sought to establish what all of the maintenance needs of the building were. That obviously included the brickwork and quite a range of other issues, including the use of car parking and the extent of those facilities. It included members' offices, the front steps, security issues, lighting and basically all of the things that were associated with the maintenance of this building. That is effectively a 20-year plan. It is an extensive plan. It recognises that some of the works that need to be done are actually fixing the sins of the past because over the 150 years this building has not always been loved as carefully as we would want to love it, and there have been some works that have been done — in one area we found some brickwork that had been prepared with a car antenna, the radio antenna from a car. That shows just how slipshod some of the works have been. We have looked at scoping the building properly, recognising its heritage values and importance in that sense and also recognising it as a workplace and a building that plays a significant role in this state.

That 20-year plan has been broken up into bite-size bits and obviously prioritised in terms of the projects that are most important. From our point of view, water penetration is our greatest enemy and it is the area that we are probably tackling most vigorously because if the water gets in, then it starts to undermine the integrity of other aspects of the building. We are really working very heavily on that. In fact the next stage of the brickwork that has been funded — and again we are pleased because for a while it looked like we might not get the money from Treasury and Finance, but it has provided \$4 million — is particularly important to us because it continues across the back. From a member's point of view, it is over the balcony area, but indeed it is extraordinarily important in terms of some of the roof space that it picks up because that roof space that it picks up is over areas where we have had serious water penetration problems — that is into chamber areas, into the library —

Mr PAKULA — My office!

Mr ATKINSON — It probably is into your office, Mr Pakula! That is a really significant area for us. This next stage is actually quite a crucial one in that sense.

The CHAIR — We have to share the questions a little bit.

Mr SMITH — Chair, can I just say that stage 4 is shown there where a yellow-green line around it. Stage 5 that we are looking towards is going further back towards the library area, the Queen's Hall area: areas that are affected by the water penetration. That is the next stage. There will still be a lot of scaffolding there, but a lot of the works will be further into the middle of the building, the Queen's Hall part of the building, to make sure that that is properly waterproofed. You really have to get up to see it, and we would like to offer an opportunity for you to get in and have a look at it. We have been able, on this overhead, to show some really good shots of some of the work that had been done before that is very poor. You only have to look at that standard of work that is there to see the way that the brickwork is falling apart and the stonework is falling apart.

On this side here, to the left where that row of stonework is just behind the scaffolding, the water has been penetrating down into that area, and that is in fact one of the places where the radio aerial off a car was actually holding part of it together.

It has been a patch-up job until now. I think it was 50 or 60 years ago that some of the work was actually patched up, where they just threw some bricks in and then they plastered over the front of it. Now all that has started to fall away. One very large piece fell and nearly hit one of the members. That is really what prompted this whole investigation into the stonework, and the fact that there is a real need for us to be able to fix things up. If you get up to the second floor, you get out of the lift and you look across at the plaster work there and the paint that is coming off, that is part of the cause or the reason for what has happened with this stonework. It is essential that that work continues on.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Speaker. A follow-up?

Mr ANGUS — Just another quick one, thank you, Chair. President, in relation to that, in terms of the governance and the management of the project, are the contractors reporting back through to the department or indeed to yourself? How does that work? Is there regular liaison there so that the Parliament is aware of these issues as they come to hand?

Mr ATKINSON — Each stage of the project is separately tendered, so the next lot of works will be tendered as well. To date one contractor has completed each stage because, as I indicated, there is limited expertise in this area, both in terms of the heritage value and also just the integrity, the sourcing of materials and so forth. It is significant. In fact, some of the work that has been done, by some of the young employees up there in particular, is quite remarkable. It is terrific to see the skills that are still available to us.

At any rate, each section of the project is scoped, is properly costed and is then subject to a reporting mechanism back through the department to the presiding officers. It is, as with Parliament's other activities, also subject to the Auditor-General taking an interest in our management and governance of these projects.

Mr ANGUS — Excellent. Thank you.

Mr PAKULA — I accept that this heritage asset management is the logical next step, but on the master plan more generally, where is it at? I will give you an example. Originally I think there was a plan for there to be enhanced security at the front of the building, with I think the office that Mr Dalla-Riva is now using, and there was also talk about how we were going to secure the balcony area because anyone can walk into the car park and up the back balcony steps et cetera. The state of the master plan more generally, can you give us that in 1 minute?

Mr ATKINSON — Yes. The point that you make about security is very apposite. As presiding officers we have been looking at that recently, in conjunction with the senior management. The previous plans for security, which included the front-of-house security, if you like, were not agreed by the previous presiding officers. Mr Smith and I have now had an opportunity to have a look at some of the reports that were put together. At this stage we do not plan to proceed with the work that had previously been proposed that involved the use of offices at the front of the building.

However, we are keen about and we have departmental officers already working on looking at the security — what we really do need in security; what are the real risks for the Parliament. There is no point in us having White House security if indeed we do not have White House threats. We are really looking at what are the real risks to this building and making sure that we are actually meeting those.

The point that you make about the external balcony is an important point. That is one of the areas we do see that we need to be looking at very carefully, because I think you are absolutely right: there is an exposure in that area, which is probably an unacceptable exposure compared with other parts of the building. But we obviously also need to make sure that members can move around the precincts fairly quickly, get to votes, have access to other facilities and so forth. So it is difficult. I guess we are encouraged that perhaps some technology improvements as well in this area of security might well result in us having less intrusive security going forward, but more effective security. That is our hope.

The CHAIR — Just before Mr Scott asks his question I want to pick up something you said. Effectively you have talked about the master plan and said that within the master plan things are fluid — priorities move a little bit — and there is periodic progress. I am wondering: can you advise what the reporting mechanisms are to inform members? As a member who has been here for quite some time — in fact, the same amount of time as you have, President — I am not aware of any formal reporting process, and it is generally by way of an informal response. Do you have such a process in mind to keep members apprised, and if not, could there be instituted a better transfer of information?

Mr ATKINSON — Look, I think that is an important area. In the past we have relied on the House Committee to provide some information. Certainly in the discussions we have had we have been talking about that happening as soon as the House Committee is actually launched — we have been waiting on appointments from the parties. As soon as we can have a House Committee meeting, it has been our intention to provide some further information on this. But I think the point that you make, Chair, is an important one.

We have actually done quite a lot of record keeping, if you like, in respect of the stonework as well, because we see that as quite important in a number of areas, both in terms of informing even architects and the broader industry of the work that we are doing and certainly demonstrating the integrity of our work in a heritage sense. But we also see it as important in terms of informing the public as well, and that was a feature of the open day at Parliament here, to show some of the work that we were doing there. Part of that thinking was also about trying to make sure that members had a greater appreciation of that project. Indeed I think the point you make is important, that with other aspects of the precinct master plan, members ought to have a greater understanding of what we are trying to achieve there. The fluidity is mostly the water coming in, by the way.

Mr SCOTT — I am happy for the President or Speaker to respond to this. The Minister for Finance promised in November last year that there would be an establishment of a parliamentary budget office within the Parliament. Is there any allocation in the 2011–12 budget or over the forward estimates for the parliamentary budget office, as you are aware?

Mr ATKINSON — I am not aware of any at this stage. We have not had those discussions with government, either, at this stage, towards developing that office.

Mr PAKULA — Because it was a pretty important commitment. If you remember, it was around the time when both parties were tick-tack-toeing on costings — Treasury, Auditor-General — and I think it was Robert Clark who said, ‘Well, we’re going to create a parliamentary budget office’, which I assume would be overseen by the Speaker and the President, and they said which would be subject to the Auditor-General. It is not my understanding that it is only for the purpose of election costings. A parliamentary budget office would have a —

Mr SCOTT — With the indulgence of the Chair, certainly I have been to other parliaments in other jurisdictions, where there is a budget office that provides important advice to members to conduct their duties.

The CHAIR — It seems, in summary, that there is no information.

Mr ATKINSON — At this point, no allocation and we have not to this stage had any discussions with the government in respect of that matter.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Ms HENNESSY — I am happy for either the President or the Speaker to respond to this question. If I could take you both to budget paper 3, page 371, noting that there has been no increase in the allocation to parliamentary investigatory committees, so a decrease in real terms. So despite there now being three standing upper house committees and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee reviewing the human rights charter, in terms of that budget allocation, how is it that parliamentary committees are meant to do their job of scrutinising the executive, if they cop a reduction to their budget in real terms?

Mr ATKINSON — This is a matter of concern to me and to the Department of the Legislative Council. We do have a concern about the adequacy of the resourcing of those committees at this point in time. I guess the one rider I would put on that is that the structure that we have is new and we perhaps are not in a position to

totally anticipate their workload and what they are going to do going forward as committees and in terms of the number of references that they might receive.

Having said that, I would regard the references already received as substantial and important references. We have allocated, to the extent that we are able to within our existing budgetary resources, a staffing complement which we believe is at best adequate to meet the needs of those committees. It would be my view and the department's view that we would need more people if those committees are to certainly receive further references. I guess the area where I would be most concerned is in the research capacity of those committees. Before the last election, I think that there was consideration of the committee structures by both the major political parties, particularly given the launch of this new structure within the Legislative Council and I think there was an anticipation by me and perhaps by some others that in fact the number of all-party parliamentary committees might well have been reduced and some resources might well have been available to support the new Legislative Council structure.

Now, there has not been a reduction in those committees and that has not allowed any discussion of how a reallocation of resources might have been achieved or might be achieved and there are some legislative restrictions, in terms of a reallocation at any rate, that I am not sure would be agreed by all of the parties. So we are in a difficult position. We are pursuing a number of options as to how we might look at some additional resourcing from budgets within the Legislative Council, — funds that were not expended in the previous year — from the Parliament, actually going to a fund where they can be used, but they can only be used on something that is effectively a one-off expenditure. So it is usually a capital item, because if it is something that incurs an ongoing commitment then those funds are not permitted to be expended in that area. So we have a difficulty in accessing even those funds, but this is a matter of ongoing discussion with the government as well.

Ms HENNESSY — Okay. Just as a supplementary, Chair?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms HENNESSY — The other issue that I think is a significant cause for concern is that the government has proposed an additional joint parliamentary investigatory committee whose role it will be to oversight the new anticorruption commission, the FOI commissioner, the Ombudsman and the LEAP data security commissioner. I would imagine that this is a significant role, in terms of being a real check and balance on the proposed anticorruption commission, yet we have not an additional dime allocated to its role. Can you confirm that there is no additional money allocated for the proposed new joint parliamentary investigatory committee?

Mr ATKINSON — We have had no discussion about additional resources for that committee at this time. I would expect, though, that if the government were putting in place that committee, I think that they would need to be considering resources, and so I would not — —

Mr PAKULA — You could not run it out of the existing allocation. You need a new appropriation.

Mr ATKINSON — Certainly the Legislative Council department would not be in a position to fund that adequately.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — Thank you, Mr Chairman. Gentlemen, I think in these hearings and certainly in newspaper reports over the last few years there has been a lot of discussion about — I think, Mr President, you alluded to it as well — utilising the former Premier's suite for a variety of activities, including some commercial activities. I would be interested if you could flesh that out a little bit more. Perhaps in the wider sense too, there seems to have been an emphasis in recent years across the Parliament of it being more of a tourist attraction than actually a workplace for both members and staff, but particularly the emphasis seems to have shifted in some way towards serving the public. It is important for the public to have access to this building, but as a priority and as more of a tourist attraction rather than it actually servicing the legislative requirements of the state. First of all, do you think that is a fair characterisation and if it is, do you see it swinging back a bit the other way?

Mr ATKINSON — We do not see this building as a tourist attraction per se, but we do see it as the most important public building in Victoria and as a building that belongs to the people of Victoria. We do believe that the access of people of Victoria to that building is absolutely paramount. Yes, it is a workplace, and it is an

important workplace. It has an important job of work to do in terms of the legislation and development and implementation for this state. I would have thought that at this point the public access had not at any stage come into conflict with that role of the Parliament as a legislature. To that extent I do not think that there is an issue. I guess the only area where you would say that there was a tension is in fact in the security matters. Yes, we could have a very secure building if we did not allow anybody from the public in and it would be a lot easier to run the place.

Mr MORRIS — Defeats the purpose of making it — —

Mr ATKINSON — We do not believe that is the priority that we ought to have as presiding officers. We do believe, as I said, that it is an important public building and that it belongs to the people of Victoria. It will be our proposal — picking up the suggestion that this might well have been the direction of recent years — that indeed there would be a continuation of whatever we could do to facilitate public access to the building on whatever occasions we can, as much as we can, without impeding, obviously, on its role as a Parliament.

I guess the subtext of your question was about a gift shop or arrangements which, as I understand it, were part of the former Premier's office. Ken might want to talk on this — we also believe that there is some value in people having an opportunity to take away something as a memento of their visit to Parliament, and we do believe that people do appreciate the visit to Parliament. Even those schoolchildren who are herded in here like cattle — we think they actually appreciate it.

Mr PAKULA — So you are saying it was a cheap shot last year?

Mr ATKINSON — No! One of the interesting things is that even the selection of portraits, plans, illustrations and so forth that are hung around the building, including the premiers rogue gallery in Queen's Hall, elicit a lot of public interest, because they are in context with the role and history of this building. We think they are quite important in that sense. As I said, people do seem to enjoy taking mementos away and it is possible that we might explore some opportunity for a better facility or some sort of facility for that in the future, but there has been no definitive position discussed at this point in time. In some ways that is captive of part of the security debate.

The CHAIR — Thank you, President.

Mr SMITH — I can only agree with what Bruce has said in regard to this matter. I am a believer that people want to take something away from a visit, wherever it may be. We do not really have a facility to enable that to happen. In fact it used to happen from the little boxes just inside the front door many years ago, but for anybody who wants to buy something now, they have to go to the second-floor side dining room area to be able to pick up something. Not all visitors get up to that particular area. I think we have got to make some decisions in regard to where people might be able to purchase something. We have had a former Premier's office sitting there for probably 10 years, empty as such, apart from the storage of books and whatever else is there that might be made available to the Parliament in the following sitting week.

I think we have got to look at using that office somewhere along the line. There is a small anteroom that goes with that. Whether that can be part of the security, part of a gift shop, as such — they are all things that would have to be looked at in the context of the master plan, the security and all of that sort of stuff. The difficulty that we had was that the master plan was looked at under the previous government and there were no real decisions made because of some disagreement between the previous President and Speaker. The President and I have had a look — we have had a briefing on the master plan — but we have not really gone into any detail as to where we are at with it.

Probably the most important thing that I would say about the master plan is that we are wanting to look at how we can get all the members of Parliament into the Parliament. We have a temporary building out the back of this place that is just about due for heritage listing itself, so we might not actually be able to get anybody into this heritage building. What we want to do is actually get people in here. A lot of the understorey of the building is in fact used for storage. We should be looking at what sort of areas are needed for that to happen and from there look at some of the other bits and pieces, particularly security, and if we need to look at a gift shop, let us look at it in the context of working out what is going to be best for the flow of people.

Whether or not we want it to become just a Parliament without anybody coming in, people want to come here and have a look around. We have to be able to best manage those people without impeding them too much in having the opportunity to go into the Parliament and look at what is happening. Here we are today, at a public hearing of PAEC, and members of the public are entitled to come and sit in here. We do not want to discourage that sort of thing, but we have to be able to ensure that we get proper flow of people through the place in secure circumstances.

The CHAIR — Speaker, I want to pick up on something you just said about utilisation of space. It is obvious to me there is a lot of space which is not utilised as well as it might be. For example, as I understand it, there is a building across the road, 157 Spring Street, of which three floors are vacant. You might clarify that.

Mr LOCHERT — No. They are occupied by public service departments.

Mr SMITH — There were empty spaces there.

The CHAIR — Thank you. They have been filled. In relation to 55 St Andrews Place, again it seems to me that there is a lower utilisation than there might be. For example, as I understand it, we now have a situation in which Hansard is working out of two buildings. It seems that for convenience naturally Hansard staff prefer to operate out of Parliament House, yet there are significant underutilised desks on the second floor across the road. There is a basement area which is a car park which is very underutilised at 55 St Andrews Place. I just wonder: is there some plan to better manage the space that we have available in our own precinct that would assist you to move people out of the chook house?

Mr ATKINSON — Yes, there is. This is an area that we are looking at in conjunction with management. The decision to vacate those three floors at 157 Spring Street was on the basis of consolidation of activities over at 55 St Andrews Place and also on the basis that there was an alternative tenant available, so that the Parliament was not stuck with the bill for unused space. There has certainly been some work to actually make some better utilisation over at 55.

As you indicate, there is some space that is not fully utilised at this point, some of which might in fact be taken up. For instance, if the webcasting project were to be extended with archiving, there would be an additional space demand with some of that. It is possible that some of these additional committees might well require additional work space as well. There are a number of demands, but certainly we are mindful of that space utilisation and are really looking at that at this point in time.

We have the difficulty that we obviously cannot have members of Parliament over at 55 St Andrews in terms of sitting weeks, and we cannot really have Hansard over there either, because both that department and the members obviously need to get back into the chambers in fairly rapid times. So there are some limitations on what we can do in that sense. Obviously Hansard does believe that it needs to be close to the Parliament itself, notwithstanding that it also does service the committees. Having people over there is fine when the committees are meeting and it suits the workload there, but, yes, they are needed here.

Mr SMITH — There is always a need for some of the space to be kept aside for members. The deputy opposition leader was using that as an electorate office for a period of time. Deanne Ryall had moved over there to use it as an electorate office while a new office was being sought for her. So there is a need. I think there are three or four — —

Mr LOCHERT — Three.

Mr K. SMITH — There are three members of Parliament over there now — there were four, I think, at one stage — so they have to be able to have some space that they can operate out of as well, to give them some privacy to be able to deal with their constituent issues and also to give them space where they can be, where someone can ring, someone can fax them or someone can email them to an office there.

Mr PAKULA — I am happy with this question if either of the presiding officers, or even Peter, deals with it. I note in the budget papers that the Auditor-General's budget is up by 1.5 per cent, which seems a curious amount because it is less than the CPI. Is it 1.5 because that is the DFM? How was the figure of 1.5 arrived at for the Auditor-General? Is that the DFM, Peter?

Mr LOCHERT — I cannot answer that, (a), because we do not negotiate the budget for the A-G ourselves. That is a process that the Auditor-General's office undertakes directly with Treasury. I am aware, though, that there are some changes in the figures that also complicate it. I think there was an adjustment there that needed to be made. I am not sure of all the details, but I think it was out by about \$100 000 and something, or figures to that effect.

Mr PAKULA — I was just looking at page 371, which shows a variation of 1.5 per cent for the A-G's office.

Mr LOCHERT — The real answer is that I cannot give you the detail, because I have not been party to the negotiations. You will have generally in the appropriation two adjustments. One is the CPI escalations and anything else that gets negotiated. In the case of the Auditor-General it may also be that it is part of their revenue generation that has been authorised. That is just conjecture, really.

Mr ATKINSON — Whilst his department is included in the Parliament's allocation, we do not actually have an involvement in the affairs of that department. He remains independent as far as the Parliament is concerned as well.

The CHAIR — And I remind the Deputy Chair that this committee has a relationship with the Auditor-General, and I am not clear that there was any issue raised by the Auditor-General about funding, in those discussions.

Mr PAKULA — I do not recall him raising it, no. So it would not be reasonable to assume that the EO budget is going to move by that amount as well?

Mr LOCHERT — I do not think it would.

Mr PAKULA — Have you decided about that, by the way?

Mr ATKINSON — We have only just been advised of the appropriation when the legislation came in, and there is a very slight increase on last year in our overall budget appropriation. I do not expect a lot of movement in terms of the budgets.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr O'BRIEN — My question arises from a perusal of budget paper 3 — service delivery. It may be appropriate if the secretary assists with this answer. I am turning to page 374. Under the Legislative Assembly section I am looking at the quantity of regional visits to schools to conduct parliamentary information talks and parliamentary role-plays, and we see that in relation to 2011–12 there are five targeted and an expected outcome of five. Then we see '2010–11 target' and in '2009–10 actual' was not made, or 'nm' — I presume that means 'not made' or something akin to that.

Mr PURDEY — I can answer that.

Mr O'BRIEN — Yes. Could you quickly explain what that means?

Mr PURDEY — We have only just established that particular service, and there was no — —

Mr SMITH — No measure.

Mr PURDEY — No measure because there was none provided in that financial year.

Mr O'BRIEN — Okay. Is that something that also would be assisted by the webcast, in particular in Victoria where we have — well, there might not be the interest, excepting what you said earlier in relation to a national audience; there may well be regional audience interest in selected excerpts: — is that something that could be further looked at, particularly if it can return a budget-neutral or even budget-positive position to the parliamentary services?

Mr ATKINSON — Look, a number of those things are being looked at. The education officer has actually conducted a review of the resources that we have provided in supporting our education outreach, and that

review included input from schools — from educators. That office, in conjunction with management, is now looking at what ought to be done. I would dare say that I would see this project as a bit of a pilot to see how it goes, because the difficulty is that Victoria is a big state, and to get resources into one area you perhaps need to look at that as distinct from perhaps advancing more broader resources to schools. It would be an interesting pilot, and certainly there is enthusiasm for the education sector for the materials that the Parliament does produce and the programs it has.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you, Mr President.

Mr SMITH — Were you aware of the DVDs that the Parliament puts out?

Mr O'BRIEN — I have seen them, and I have seen the website. I certainly appreciated receiving a copy of my inaugural speech as a service to new members, and I thank you all for arranging that. Those one-off speeches, particularly, to members may be some way — I do not know if that can be, again, revenue neutral — on particular occasions; maybe 5 or 10 a year or some sort of small number. However that was arranged it was a useful service.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT — Thank you, Chair. Regarding the appropriation to the Parliament, part of it goes to the presiding officers undertaking overseas travel. There was agreement last year that presiding officers would publish details and costs of their travel on the parliamentary website. Is it still intended for that occur?

Mr ATKINSON — I would not see that we would be looking to change protocols that have been put in place. I mean, the travel that is undertaken by presiding officers is in response to their duties in the Parliament, and I would think that reporting on our responsibilities is imperative.

Mr SCOTT — Just as a follow-up, is there any planned travel at this point?

Mr ATKINSON — Yes, I am headed off tomorrow. I am actually going with many of your colleagues to Crete for the 70th anniversary of Australia's participation in the battle there. There is a significant commemoration there, and a contingent of MPs from several states — certainly from Victoria — are going there.

There is a presiding officers conference in July which involves presiding officers and clerks from Parliaments throughout the Pacific area — Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. That is actually, I think, a particularly important one, because it is sharing a lot of our experience and knowledge with parliaments that are less well resourced and sometimes less mature than our parliamentary system, and I think there is a great benefit in terms of what we share at those.

The CHAIR — Mr Pakula, you had a related question?

Mr PAKULA — Just so I am clear, are we talking about similar reporting that cabinet ministers do, which is basically up on the website? There is name, purpose of trip, location, total cost — that sort of basic reporting?

Mr ATKINSON — I think we would probably have to have a look at what the facility is for us to actually report in that way. It occurs to me that perhaps the annual report is one of the better ways for us to report because it is a document that people actually do access from the Parliament. Where we would publish it I am not sure. I am not familiar with where ministers actually publish that information, whether or not —

Mr PAKULA — The DIIRD website.

Mr ATKINSON — The DIIRD website.

Mr PAKULA — The old DIIRD website.

Mr ATKINSON — My answer would be 'I am not sure'. We would have to have a look at what was the suitable thing, but there would certainly be no intention to avoid providing that information, and I would expect it would be a similar profile of information.

The CHAIR — Mr Angus.

Mr TUNNECLIFFE — I was just going to add that we do currently — in the department's annual report, if the presiding officers have gone anywhere, that does get a mention: a brief summary of when the trip was and the purposes of it.

The CHAIR — Thanks. Mr Angus.

Mr ANGUS — Thank you, Mr Chairman. Gentlemen, I refer back to the last page of your presentation with the 2011–2012 priorities, in particular the first two items there, which are the replacement of Parliament House fire detection systems and the replacement of non-compliant switchboards. I am just wondering if you could flesh that out a bit for the committee in relation to the scope of works there and indeed the timing of those, particularly given I probably, like numbers of members coming here today, went past the electricians as they had the temporary lighting up and were seemingly working hard on these issues, so just in relation to the scope and timing of that, please.

Mr ATKINSON — That project will need to be funded out of our depreciation allowance so we will need to go back to the Department of Treasury and Finance for approval to expend those funds. That was not funding that was provided by DTF in respect of this budget. So I guess our first step would be that the project would be scoped. We obviously have an understanding of what our problem is; we need to have an understanding of what the solution is and to get an effective costing, tender and so forth.

The answer to your question is, because we believe that particularly in regard to the fire protection system, it is an urgent priority, so our approach would be to do it as soon as possible, but we now need to get in the scope what can be done and what needs to be done.

There are issues in terms of picking up on existing wiring systems, how much we can use the existing wiring systems in the building, and how much we need that is new and so forth. The indicative cost, if you like, of the works on the fire system was about \$1.2 million.

Mr PAKULA — I want to ask a question of the Speaker. Under the Legislative Assembly outputs at page 374 there is an item, 'Procedural support, documentation preparation and provision of information for Assembly' and there is a performance measure of, 'Member satisfaction that advice is responsive, prompt, clear and objective'.

I can see the Chair grinning at me and I do not want this to turn into a bunfight. I do just want to ask one question of the Speaker about this because it is important that members do understand what they can and cannot do, and it goes to the matter of question time and the advice that you provide to members, both in the chamber and also outside the chamber.

There has been cause for members of the opposition to speak to you recently about what they can and cannot ask a minister. As I understand it, one of the pieces of advice you have given is that ministers can only be asked questions directly about their portfolio responsibilities, and you have defined that in quite a narrow way, certainly as far as the opposition is concerned.

We are confused because there are examples that you could go to in other jurisdictions, Queensland being one example, where you had a minister there who was, I think, the Minister for Health.

Ms HENNESSY — Gordon Nuttall.

Mr PAKULA — Gordon Nuttall was the Minister for Health and he effectively got done because he was taking contributions from building developers — so health and building developers are not in the same portfolio but he got done because he was behaving — —

Ms HENNESSY — Corruptly.

Mr PAKULA — The court found he was behaving corruptly. Is it your advice to members that if the opposition, the Greens or anyone want to question a minister about a matter such as that where they might be behaving in an improper way but outside their portfolio, that is not a legitimate area for the opposition to examine a minister on in question time?

In the Gordon Nuttall example, could someone in that circumstance not be questioned about that behaviour in question time? Is that what you have been telling members?

Mr SMITH — No, what I have been saying to members of the opposition is that I am more than happy to allow questions that relate to government administration to be put through to ministers or to the Premier.

Mr PAKULA — Right, let us just go to that example, when you have got a minister — let us not be provocative — —

Ms HENNESSY — Cute.

Mr PAKULA — and talk about health; let us talk about the Minister for Education. If the Minister for Education was being accused of taking an improper commission from someone not involved in the education sector, could that minister be asked a question about that in question time?

Mr SMITH — If in the way it was put it related to government administration I would allow it to go through and be asked, but if it is not: no.

Mr MORRIS — Surely this is an entirely hypothetical proposition. I have no argument with the question being asked but I think it should be asked on the basis of fact, not ifs, whens and maybes.

Mr PAKULA — Do you want me to be clear?

Ms HENNESSY — We can, but we chose to not be deliberately provocative.

The CHAIR — What we need to do is get back to the relevance of the question to the estimates process, and the link is not absolutely clear to me so I would like you, Deputy Chair, to clarify for the committee that there is a link, specifically with estimates, and put the question again, if you wish, to the Speaker in a way in which he might address that.

Mr PAKULA — And for the benefit of all of us, Chair, I will ask only one more thing about it because it does go to this performance measure about advice being clear and objective. So that we are clear, wouldn't you agree, Speaker, that it is always a matter of government administration if a question is asked about the probity of any minister's dealings about any matter? Isn't a minister's probity at the heart of government administration, no matter what?

Mr SMITH — A minister's probity is certainly important, and I see that there are not only questions that could be asked in question time, it has got to relate to that minister's administration of his department. The question in regard to David Davis — let's not beat around the bush — was not in relation to his department; it was not in relation to the way that he administered his department.

Mr PAKULA — But neither was the Gordon Nuttall question.

Mr SMITH — That may well have been in Queensland, but we are talking about the Victorian Parliament.

The CHAIR — I am having some difficulty with the direction of this. I have taken a fairly tolerant view about the scope of questions.

Mr PAKULA — We did leave it until the end.

The CHAIR — I know you have left it until the end.

Ms HENNESSY — And we have not jumped up and down to make the point. You do not get busted if you do not engage in corrupt activity outside your portfolio.

The CHAIR — I have been waiting for such an intervention. The issue here, as I understand it, is that the opposition members would like to engage with the Speaker in a discussion about the interpretation of the standing orders and parliamentary precedent in respect to question time. That is not, I think, a fit subject for discussion at the estimates hearing. As far as I am concerned we have had enough of it, we have been tolerant about taking that, but I would like to move on and if you will bear with me, I will call—

Mr O'BRIEN — On a point of order, Chair— —

The CHAIR — I don't think you need to raise a point of order. I have ruled on the issue and we are moving on. So if you have a question— —

Mr O'BRIEN — I do have a question. I do not believe that was the full position in relation to question time being the only point where matters of probity can be raised; they can also be raised on a substantive motion. I think that needs to be made under the rules in the Legislative Council. But my question is, just returning to the issues that you have touched on, Mr President and Mr Speaker, in relation to the heritage building, it seems to me that to some extent there may be externalities, from an economic sense, being matters that are not necessarily incorporated in the present budgetary allocations, through which this building actually contributes to the Victorian economy— potentially tourism.

In a sense, as an old building, it may have a slightly different category of classification than just access to the public, and certainly Victorians would demand and expect and are entitled to a right of access as members of the public.

But just as with the great Westminster cathedral, the House of Commons and other heritage buildings in this state, there is an expectation that funds raised here will go to the upkeep of the building, as part of a tourism facility. It is often said by bodies such as the National Trust and so on, and it may already be incorporated in the management plan as it is with the City of Melbourne as well — and if it is that is fantastic — but is there a concept or a role, in promoting Melbourne, for capturing these externalities of security, heritage, tourists and maybe some provision of gifts in a sort of tourism promotion-type aspect to the management plan?

Mr ATKINSON — That is quite a question.

Mr O'BRIEN — Just say yes!

Mr ATKINSON — For part of that question I was thinking, when you were talking about tourist facilities, about the Twelve Apostles and how a couple of them fell down, and I am hoping that that doesn't happen to us!

Mr O'BRIEN — I am too — that is a wonderful part of my electorate.

Mr ATKINSON — I often say to people that, provided Ken and I, with the good graces of our staff, have done the right thing, in a hundred years time people will still be coming to this building and admiring it. I cannot think of a single building that anyone is putting up today, anywhere in the city, that in a hundred years time people will go and admire.

We need to recognise the extraordinary heritage value of this building, and to that extent it is part of a suite of buildings and parks and certain other facilities that we are very fortunate to have in Melbourne by the grace and vision of our forebears, and hopefully by our own proper management going forward.

The management plan certainly does not provide for Ferris wheels in the car park, nor does it provide for, if you like, an extensive promotion of the building beyond what already occurs in a heritage sense. Whilst before I mentioned that we are very keen to make sure we do not limit the public's access to this building, at the same time we are not in a situation where we would want to be encouraging excessive foot traffic through the building at this point in time because I am not sure that we can necessarily manage it. So there are some management issues that we need to look at as far as this building playing a role in terms of a tourism focus is concerned.

Mr O'BRIEN — Can I have a short supplementary question?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr O'BRIEN — Just by way of example, I notice that a number of wedding parties occasionally use the buildings and the grounds. Again, I have no objection to that, and I note that whilst churches generally do not charge, it is generally an accepted practice when you book a church for a wedding, you make a gratuity payment, again for the upkeep of the church. What happens in relation to the booking of the Parliament or the precinct for weddings and photographs? Is that something for which a return is derived or not?

Mr ATKINSON — No, at this stage there is not a charge made to them. What happens is that some of those people do not book, they just turn up, and the situation is that from a Parliament management point of view, the PSOs provide a priority to those people who have given us the courtesy of making a booking or a notice that they were coming. I guess there is an issue with some of those sorts of things on that scale as to setting up a basis of taking bookings and charging and so forth, but it would probably cost you more than you actually make. So there are issues there, and I guess from our point of view that is part of the role that the Parliament plays. We think it is delightful that people use it as a backdrop.

Mr SMITH — If people use the gardens or any of the facilities out there they have to get approval for that. They cannot just wander in; they will not get past the PSOs for a start. So — yes, if they want to use it we do not have any objection to that. We allow them to use it.

If they want to use any of the catering facilities they pay for the catering. That is a charge that they have to pay. If they want to use the facilities after hours, they have to pay not only for the catering but also for the staff to be here to man the place, and that is sorted out and agreed to before approval is given— that they will pay those additional costs. So if they want to get inside the house in non-sitting times — yes, they have to pay. But using the steps of Parliament — no, they do not have to pay.

Mr ATKINSON — I think there might be an instance where an advertiser used the steps of the Parliament and was charged, but I am not sure. If it was a commercial use, at any rate, on a significant scale, first of all it would need to be at a time when Parliament was not obviously impinged; but we would obviously look at that. For example, if Toyota came along and said, ‘We want to do a Toyota commercial’, or if Fiat came along and wanted to do *The Italian Job* up the front steps, we would say we need some funding for that.

Mr O’BRIEN — Thank you for that. I congratulate you on the prioritisation of the sandstone. I know that water and sandstone do not mix. In heritage buildings it is very important to address the water, because it will just filter through the rest of the building and make it a much bigger problem into the future, so congratulations and thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your response. We are just about out of time, but we have one final question.

Ms HENNESSY — Is there anything in the budget which will assist the Parliament to make IT service assistance available after hours or on the weekend?

Mr ATKINSON — There is effectively no opportunity to extend IT services for outside of general work hours. People do work beyond nine to five, but their ability to provide a 24-hour 7-days-a-week service is not available under our existing budget arrangements.

Ms HENNESSY — If only my hours were nine to five!

Mr ATKINSON — I think we are all in that boat.

The CHAIR — Thank you, President. That concludes the consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolio of the parliamentary departments. I thank the presiding officers and departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been a useful session. I do not think there are any questions on notice outstanding.

Mr PAKULA — Yes.

Ms HENNESSY — Yes; we might have one.

The CHAIR — There may be a question which will come to you, and when it does could we have a written response within 21 days? Thank you very much for your attendance.

Committee adjourned.