

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget Estimates 2019–20 (Parliamentary Departments)

Melbourne—Friday, 31 May 2019

MEMBERS

Mr Philip Dalidakis—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallenge

WITNESSES

Mr Colin Brooks, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,
Mr Shaun Leane, President of the Legislative Council,
Ms Bridget Noonan, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly,
Mr Andrew Young, Clerk of the Legislative Council, and
Mr Peter Lochert, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this inquiry into the 2019–20 Budget Estimates. Its aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community. The committee will now begin consideration of the portfolio of the parliamentary departments, with the Speaker and the President as Presiding Officers and the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly present as well.

All evidence given today is protected by the Parliamentary Committees Act. This means that it attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty, and by the way, this will be a question of mine: whether or not we can build an area to hold people in our Parliament once more.

To the Speaker and to the President, I invite you to make a brief opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes.

Mr BROOKS: Very good. Thank you very much, Chair. I thought we had 5 minutes.

The CHAIR: Great, 5 minutes it is.

Mr BROOKS: Firstly, thank you very much. I cannot think of a place I would rather be on a Friday night than with all of you giving a paid presentation. I apologise in advance for those sitting to my left for having to look at my ear. I had a slight operation yesterday. I know it is not very pleasant, but coming off—

The CHAIR: You are a Collingwood supporter, correct?

Mr BROOKS: It was not a one-eyed operation; it was a one-eared operation, and I know it is not very pleasant to look at.

Visual presentation.

Mr BROOKS: As we walk through these slides—we will go to the next slide thank you, Secretary—I am sure that the committee has had a chance to look at the Appropriation (Parliament 2019–2020) Bill, which passed the Assembly this week. We have a total budget in the 19–20 financial year of \$188.8 million—that is excluding the budget for VAGO and the PBO. Some of the things included in that increase of just over \$10 million are the increased amount that we have received from the government for funding of electorate office rentals and relocation costs. It is something that I am happy to talk about a bit further on, but there has been an escalation in rental prices that we have faced, and that has led to us having some difficulty in placing members in suitable electorate office accommodation within their electorates. So we made an application through ERC for additional funding there. We have got some funding for that. There is some funding for the performance audit of VAGO, and also there is an increase in members' electorate office and communications budgets, which relates to an increase in voter counts. There is a formula that determines electorate office communications budgets based on voter count. There has been an increase. So there is a little bit of extra money coming to members of Parliament to service their constituencies in that regard.

The next slide is a fairly basic pie chart showing where the big spending areas are within the parliamentary budget. As you could imagine, quite rightly DPS, in the top left-hand corner, is accounting for 26 per cent of our service expenditure. The Assembly, Council and committees budgets are across the top there. Members

administered budgets are actually not budgets that are administered as such by members but budgets that go to servicing members costs, so EO rentals, electorate officers' salaries—those sorts of things—utility costs in members' electorate offices. Then at the bottom of the pie chart you can see there the actual members electorate office and training and communication budgets.

Some of the key achievements or initiatives that we have worked on—and this one is one that I did not realise. As most members, I suppose in the past I have focused at election time on the election itself and, like everybody here, getting re-elected. But being a Presiding Officer through this election period has opened my eyes to the amount of work that our parliamentary staff do in transitioning from one Parliament to the next. It is interesting to see how many people down some of their tools in their respective work areas and collaborate with other team members to assist in the transition. It is a fantastic thing to see the parliamentary organisation across all departments come together to assist in that transition. As the slide shows, there have been 77 office changeovers; we had 21 former members being resettled—some of those retiring, some of those unfortunately losing seats unexpectedly, and we have to deal sensitively with them and their staff in terms of that resettlement process; 38 new MPs starting—and that of course flows through to a whole lot of new electorate officers servicing those members. We run 3-hour induction sessions for starting electorate officers now; we have had 129 of those since the start of the year, which indicates the number of new electorate officers starting up with members.

Members will be very much aware of the works going on around the precinct: the completion of the new office accommodation at the back of Parliament House, which has been a successful project; it came in under budget. It is about making sure that members and their staff have an appropriate workplace environment, at the same time protecting the heritage of this wonderful building that we are all very lucky to be custodians of for a relatively short period of time. Our job is to make sure that people can work properly but also to make sure that we pass on this building in a better condition than we found it, and that is exactly what the parliamentary precinct renewal program is all about. Much of it is about boring stuff for many people—waterproofing, replacing stonework, making sure services are up to scratch. There has been a large effort recently, as part of the circulation work, to replace services—things like water, power, communications, sewage. It is stuff that members do not see and would not find that exciting, but it is really important that we do not have to do it again in 10 or 15 years time and it is done properly, and as we progress through the renewal project we do not have to come back to some of those works.

Mr LEANE: Seeing we have got 10 minutes, Chair, just on the stonework, something that I do not think people know is that—

The CHAIR: I had accepted the 5 minutes that your colleague had offered!

Mr LEANE: This is the only project in Australia that is training stonemasons. Two apprentices have gone through their time on this project, and there are two apprentices going through their apprenticeship now on this particular project. It is a great project for them to learn their trade. There is a stonemason that works on this project, and Colin and I witnessed his work. We reckoned he was Michelangelo in a previous life. He gets a bit of stone and a couple chisels and he can turn it into anything. It is just amazing. So I would encourage all members, if they get a chance, to have a look at it.

Ms VALLENCE: Is that Joe?

Mr LEANE: Peter.

Mr BROOKS: Peter. Yes, fantastic work being done.

The CHAIR: Not that Peter!

Mr BROOKS: No, that is right.

The CHAIR: Or he is still looking to diversify in the latter stages of his career.

Mr BROOKS: We do not let this Peter near sharp instruments. Anyway. Speaking of sharp instruments, we will move to the next slide. Security at the Parliament is a really serious matter. We have a very clear focus on

the security framework and operational security in the next few years; it is a key priority for us. There has been a lot of work done over previous years, and members of PAEC may recall seeing similar slides to this in previous years. This just goes to demonstrate the importance of our screening points as people come in to visit Parliament. These are some of the items that have been seized as people try to get into the Parliament. Interestingly this year there is a can of Mace in that bottom right-hand corner and a bullet in the top right-hand corner, believe it or not brought into the Parliament by a grade 6 student. So that is the importance of that screening and making sure of the people coming in and that we have a secure passholder system. We rely very much on members and staff who are passholders to ensure that, as they come into the building, other people who do not have passes check in through secure properly. Something we are going to be focusing on, as I say, over this year and next year is building an understanding of the need for a security culture here at the Parliament of Victoria. We understand that it is an open building to the public—it always should be. We have to balance that need for people to be able to access the members of Parliament and our system of democracy in an open way with an understanding that there are some significant threats and we do have to make sure we have a secure environment. There will be some changes, and we want to engage with members in a whole range of different forums as we move through those changes to our security environment.

It is worth pointing out just in terms of that slide there were 44 prohibited items that have been seized in the year to date, so 44 of those sorts of items that we have referred to police. That is out of 104 677 visitors to the Parliament over the same period. So it is a small number compared to the number of visitors that are coming in but still a great concern to us.

Moving to the next slide, cybersecurity is a key focus for us. Our head of ICT, Matt Smith, has scared the daylight out of all of us in relation to the threat that cybersecurity poses to our ICT systems. We are putting in place a number of measures, most of which I do not understand but Matt does, but a whole range of other things, including educating users of our systems about the dangers of some of the ways in which our systems can be accessed in a malicious way. The slide there shows what is known as a brute force attack—an attempt to overload our system with a number of queries, if you like, to access our internet site. It shows there some days during May where you have got very low traffic, and then on 17 May, I think it is—if my eyes serve me right—481 903 queries in one day. We are averaging 5000 cybersecurity threat events a day. That peaked at 10 million in October last year. We do have a significant level of phishing and ransom-type emails, which goes the point I mentioned before about making sure that members and staff are aware of what sorts of emails look suspicious and they should not be opening.

In terms of measures, some 60 per cent of email traffic is identified as suspect and dropped—a large proportion of email traffic coming in. As I said, our IT unit is performing regular network and security upgrades across the system. I might hand over to the President now to finish off our presentation.

Mr LEANE: I will try and breeze through these quickly. Actually I might go to the slides as far as the aspirations for this Parliament. I think the other slides were self-explanatory. Colin and I have aspirations for this Parliament, and a couple of them are to practically engage with some of the Victorian NGOs that do good work for Victoria, and also we want to proactively engage the First Peoples of Victoria.

One of the ways we want to proactively engage good NGOs—and I am talking about ones we will all know: the Salvos, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Jesuits and some of the great social enterprises which we all know—is embrace them in a way that we want them to be able to use this building and also support them in a number of ways. I might be able to go into that in more detail later, hopefully. Also with the First Peoples of Victoria, we have done a bit of work around that. There was an approach in the last term about the First Peoples of Victoria not feeling too welcome and comfortable here, and I know a previous member, Lidia Thorpe, did bring that up. So we have done a bit of investigation into that, and I think we have decided the way forward is for us to produce a reconciliation action plan, which will be a catch-all, hopefully, on being able to pick up ways to proactively engage the First Peoples of Victoria. I know I am going longer than you want, Chair, but we see that as a two-way street, because with the NGOs and both of those groups we see that they can help us as members of Parliament and help us in the Parliament as far as helping us to be better representatives of the people we represent and helping us with training courses around, as we have got there, complex social issues. We want to in every electorate office say—

The CHAIR: You can keep going. You are just eating into the opposition time. So that is up to you.

Mr LEANE: I will stop in one second. I just wanted to give one example.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That is not true at all, President. Go your hardest.

Mr LEANE: I just wanted to say one example is a woman with a couple of young children going to the foyer of an electorate office that presents herself to the EO as a victim of family violence and how we can have a uniform way of us all approaching that and assisting that person, and that is just one example. I do not know whose time I have eaten into, Chair, but—

The CHAIR: You have eaten into the government's; let me say that.

Mr LEANE: It was delicious, so thank you.

The CHAIR: I will pass to Ms Stitt in just a moment. I just want to take the opportunity to make a couple of very general comments. The first one is that in the four and a half years that I have been a member of Parliament I have had nothing but the most positive interactions with parliamentary staff here, the attendants, the clerks, the support staff and indeed even the secretary, and I want to put on record my thanks.

You talked about security. I do not think that I have talked about this publicly, but as a minister I had a number of death threats, and I even had somebody stalk me home, which required the intervention of the security team, both the Parliament and Victoria Police. The work that they did is serious and I cannot be, again, more complimentary after the experiences that I and my family had to unfortunately go through. We have four new members of this committee that have joined Parliament for the first time. Security considerations, unfortunately, are a growing issue that as members of Parliament we need to deal with. And I just want to again put on my record my thanks to Mr Williams and his team and to all of the staff that put themselves out to make sure that we are well served and able to do our jobs as members of Parliament.

Ms STITT: Thank you, Chair. And thank you to the Presiding Officers for attending today, and a shout-out to the sparkies in the Assembly and the Council.

Mr LEANE: This day was always going to come.

Ms STITT: I might take you to a couple of the issues that you touched on in your presentation, first in relation to electorate office accommodation. You will know that in the forward estimates there is an additional \$2.8 million to cover additional costs associated with electorate offices. That is budget paper 3, page 118. Can you just explain to the community what the drivers were for the increase in that funding in a little bit more detail?

Mr BROOKS: Yes. Look, strangely enough one of the major sources of complaint that I received as a Presiding Officer in my first couple of years was members who needed to relocate, either because their electorate office was outside their electorate or for a range of reasons the lease was finishing and they were being forced to move out of an office and wanting to be located in a suitable place for people to access within their community. But the problem was that for a number of years the escalation of our funding for rental and relocation costs had not kept pace with property market, which had raced ahead. I think our recent figures were about 5.1 per cent, and of course our funding was escalating at about 2.5 per cent. So there was a growing gap between what we should be providing to members, what members would expect and what we were able to provide. And if we did not resolve that issue, it would have meant that there would be a lessening in the standard of accommodation that members would have received or the locations would have been less than desirable.

At the moment we are paying average rent in regional areas of some \$45 000, and in metro areas \$55 000. According to our property unit the sort of rentals we should be looking at in broad terms in regional areas would be about \$65 000, and \$85 000 for metro areas. So it is significantly more than where we are currently at. There has also been an increase in the costs of the physical work involved in relocating—the fit-out and the cost of moving someone from one place to another. We put a submission forward through the budget process to government, and that has been funded.

Some of the challenges are also a little bit nuanced. We have had members who, for example, in regional areas might be in a town where rents for commercial accommodation are quite cheap, quite low, but there is the

unavailability of stock so there is not ready-made office accommodation for us to lease, and then the converse problem in some areas where the rents are higher, maybe some parts of Melbourne for example, where market rates are very high and there is an availability of good accommodation but the rents are just really quite high and sometimes out of our reach. The extra funding will help us to bridge that gap a bit and get members in.

We have a large backlog of requests for people to move into different offices, and we prioritise those moves. We have to prioritise them based on things like OH&S and safety. Sometimes they are out of an office completely so we have to obviously address those issues, or where they might be outside their electorate because of redistribution. Those sort of take priority. And then there is a scaling down where members might want to move in an electorate for a range of reasons but they sort of come after the more serious ones.

Ms STITT: Speaker, can I just take you now to community engagement? And I take you to budget paper 3, page 372. Can you outline for the committee how this funding is being used to engage more effectively with community organisations and NGOs?

Mr BROOKS: I will turn to the President in a moment but just to kick off I will just say that members of Parliament and political parties will obviously seek to engage members of their constituency and more broadly the Victorian community. The Parliament has a distinct role in engaging with the Victorian community to inform and educate people about how the Parliament works and, if you like, to engage in particular the disengaged, so those people who do not feel that they have a voice in the Parliament or understand how the parliamentary processes work. I certainly feel that it is our job to try and bridge that gap and to reach out through a range of measures—young people is a good example. But there is often great value in forming partnerships with particular organisations, and I think the President has probably got a few examples to give.

Mr LEANE: Yes. I suppose there are some nuts and bolts things. As I said, this is aspiration of the Speaker and myself in this Parliament. But some nuts and bolts things that we are going ahead with: in early December we are inviting eight of the biggest social enterprises to come into the Parliament. They will award their employees of the year in Queen's Hall, and we are hoping that the Premier, maybe the opposition leader and other parties will be more than welcome to be at that function, and then we will have a bit of a celebration out at the back in the annexe as well. We are doing some work with some good groups—the McAuley's women's services, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and other organisations around. And the secretary is doing some great work in this area, which I have asked him to do. The library, with the assistance of others, will produce a paper that those groups will, whether it be individually or collectively, present here at the Parliament around a number of social issues and how everyone may be able to assist. So we are working on ways, as I said, to make these NGOs that do great work feel welcome and feel that this is their Parliament House as well.

When I spoke before, Ms Stitt, about a two-way street, I actually spoke to the Salvation Army today about if they could do some work for us in being able to describe to electorate officers, and MPs for that matter, just how to deal with someone who is homeless, and I am not saying how to deal with it as a case manager and find somewhere for them to live, but how to deal with them in a respectful, organised way if we do come across them.

As far as the First Peoples, we have asked them for assistance as well, to try to get them to feel that this is their Parliament—and it is very important that they feel this is their Parliament, because their backgrounds in Victoria go back 65 000 years compared to some of ours—which I think is very important. The Assembly has already done some of this work in previous years, but the Council staff are going to do a cultural awareness training session with a gentleman called Richard Frankland in a few weeks time, and I would like to see that actually extended to electorate officers as well down the track. So we are enlisting their assistance. Also, in rolling out our plan there are some buildings here that we would like to see named with First Peoples' words, so we have enlisted VACL—I am going to get the acronym wrong—which is the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, to assist us with ideas of what we can name certain parts of the building. We are quite excited about the trajectory we are on. Getting back to that, we just think we need to proactively seek involvement of some of these groups into the Parliament, and as I said, we feel it is a two-way street.

Ms STITT: So how will you consult with the Indigenous community around that action plan? Is it going to be a formal process? And how will the Parliament ensure that everyone's voice is heard?

Mr LEANE: Reconciliation action plans are being done all across our community, and Chair, I should have invited you, but I attended the St Kilda Football Club's launch of their reconciliation action plan last week just to observe it. Football clubs are doing it. Telstra has done it. Companies are doing it. I think that the bottom line is Parliament will own this plan; it will be the Parliament's plan. We will ask for advice, we will ask for input—I have spoken to a number of people already—but at the end of the day we will own the plan. It will just be a way of achieving our aspiration around actively engaging the First People of Victoria. We see this as a way of doing it the best way we can rather than in an ad hoc way. We might put a plaque out the front of the building, but will that equate to anything different—to making the First People of Victoria feeling like this is their Parliament as well?

Ms STITT: I might ask the Speaker now to talk a little bit about school tours, which is obviously a hugely popular and important part of the life of this Parliament, and something that I know we are all pretty passionate about. Can you take the committee through how many school visits there were during the 17–18 period?

Mr BROOKS: Thanks very much, Ms Stitt. So the school tour program, or the education program, can probably be broken into a number of parts. There are the tours that come through where students are shown through the building. There is also the role play tours, where the students—you might have seen them if you have been here on a non-sitting day; I think there are about three role plays each non-sitting day—get to sit in the chamber and carry out different roles in the chamber and effectively pass a bill through the house, which I think is a fantastic part of the program; in fact it is my favourite part of the school program. I think the students probably get more out of that and more understanding of the process than any other factor. We also go out to schools both in metropolitan Melbourne and in regional Victoria and do visits and role plays in those environments as well, which is really important. Even though we do see quite a number of schools from rural and regional Victoria in the building from time to time, it is obviously a lot harder for those schools to get in here. So for the Parliament to go out and actually run those programs in regional areas I think is quite important. We would love to have more funding to do more of that, and I think down the track it will be something we would like to work towards, but at the moment the staff we have doing that work do a great job, and all the feedback from the teachers is great.

We have a number of other tours as well aside from school tours. We have specific tours based on architecture. So architecture students from universities or people with particular interests will come through the building and get taken through, the same with art, and of course the gardens as well attract people who are interested in landscape design and gardening. The figures that I have got here in my briefing notes indicate that around 65 000 people year to date have come through on an organised tour. That is a significant number of people who have come through the building either as a member of the public coming up the front steps and taking part in one of the organised tours or indeed as school students. Of school students, there are 31 700 that have done a booked tour, and that includes sometimes, as I said, role plays or coming in and watching question time and those sorts of things. So it is a fantastic part of our program.

Ms STITT: And the pop-up parliaments—is that what you were referring to earlier, where you go out to visit schools, or is it something different?

Mr BROOKS: This is an innovative approach that the staff at Parliament trialled—well, they have done a few of them now. The one that I can give you as an example is where the environment committee was looking at environmental water issues—I am not sure if any members here were on that committee. They were taking evidence in some regional towns in western Victoria, from memory, as an example.

Mr RIORDAN: Colac specifically.

Mr BROOKS: Colac, yes.

Ms NOONAN: Birchip.

Mr BROOKS: Birchip, yes. The education unit went out and ran some education sessions in the local schools with the kids and also at community centres with the general community, and then the next day the committee had a hearing. So people in the town and children from the school were both able to learn about how Parliament works and then the next day or later that day participate in a pretty important committee inquiry that

was happening as well. So it is a good way of combining both the work of committees and the education function of Parliament, so that was what we refer to as a pop-up Parliament. Again that is something that would be really good to see more of if we can stretch our resources to do that.

Ms STITT: Terrific. I will just ask both of you a little bit about—we spoke about schoolchildren, but youth engagement, so obviously the need to engage young people in our Parliament and our democratic systems. Can you talk a little bit about what you are doing in the area of social media and promoting Parliament to young Victorians?

Mr LEANE: Over to you. I have backed off on my social media.

Mr BROOKS: Aside from Shaun and I both putting our baseball caps on backwards and going on Instagram—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Get on Snapchat, Speaker.

Mr RIORDAN: Shaun has got the hairdo. I mean, you're trying to—

The CHAIR: What about Snapchat?

Mr BROOKS: Yeah, nah. This is a language my children understand that I do not understand, which actually goes to the point that I was going to make. So a couple of years ago—Andres Lomp is in the gallery and will correct me if I am wrong—we started getting some work done by the Deakin University FreelancingHUB, so this is where Deakin University get students from across different disciplines to work on a project for a partner organisation, in this case the Parliament. The task was to come up with a digital engagement strategy for young people for the Parliament, so instead of asking older people to come up with a youth engagement strategy on social media, it was asking young people themselves to do that. They produced a road map for us to do that. And then on top—

The CHAIR: Can I suggest that we use the term 'life experienced'?

Mr BROOKS: Yes, that is right. We are life experienced. So we have just started to roll that program out; we have taken those recommendations on board and are starting to roll that out, importantly.

We also have youth associates. So we have had over the last three years, I think, a number of youth associates, which is effectively a part-time job for a young person. Again limited resources, but I think we have been able to allocate about 160 hours worth of work to people on a placement, if you like, to come in and do some work implementing that digital engagement strategy, so Parliament's Facebook, Parliament's Instagram account. The current youth associate, Sherry-Rose, is an African-Australian working with us, and she produced a number of videos that centred around our open day, Parliament open day. Parliament open day this year was held during Cultural Diversity Week, and I think there were around 100 000 views of her video work—a fantastic example of that system working.

We are doing some work with the Foundation for Young Australians, so they are going to report later this year on what young people would like to see the Parliament talking about, which will be interesting. And in terms of our figures on social media, last year we had a 39 per cent increase in our Facebook following and 286 per cent increase in our Instagram following, so I am not sure if that is coming off a low base or not but—

Members interjecting.

Mr BROOKS: That would be like three extra followers for me. So in terms of Facebook, we now have about 51 000 followers, and of that interestingly more than half are aged under 34, which is what I would refer to as young.

Ms STITT: Okay. Well, that is fantastic. Just finally—last question from me—are there any events coming up in the Parliament that you are wanting to make the committee aware of in terms of some of the things you have talked about today?

Mr LEANE: Look, I think we might have covered the one that we are planning towards the end of the year. But we are really keen. I mean, we are working on a number of fronts, a number of initiatives, not just on the couple of aspirations that we have put up on the board but we are really open to suggestions. A number of MLCs are constantly in my ear about different ideas, including yourself, about how we can make this place more welcoming to everyone and utilise it as much as we can. We have got some ideas. The coffee is percolating but it is not ready to drink.

Ms STITT: Thank you, President, and thank you, Speaker. That is—

Mr BROOKS: Can I just throw a little advert in? That Foundation for Young Australians project that I mentioned before—they are producing the State of the Future project, so that comes back to us in September this year. They are not sure yet how they engage with members, whether they present their work to a committee, a particular committee of the Parliament, or a group of MPs, but it is important that I think hopefully members of Parliament attend that or engage with those young people when they have done that work, take that work seriously and listen to what they have come forward with.

Mr RICHARDSON: Just quickly, in the moment when items or weapons are confiscated, what is the interaction with the individual? Is it generally young people who have just got something in their bag? What is the interaction in that moment during that security—

The CHAIR: And also follow up with a school if they are part of a school group.

Mr BROOKS: I might pass it over to our secretary to explain that process.

Mr LOCHERT: The items are generally found as part of the search process at the beginning. They could be either in a bag or a container or something like that that goes through the X-ray machine, or it could be on the person, so the first contact and the first interaction will be with the Wilson people who do the actual search. Now it depends very much on what the item is. Out of the items that you saw there, they are a subset of around 15 000 items that we would normally take. Some of those would be dangerous items in our definition, and the interaction there with the visitor will be, ‘Look, we prefer you not to take that in. Can you please surrender it; here’s a ticket, pick it up on the way out’.

It is very different if it is a prohibited item under law, in which case the person is asked to step to the side, a PSO is called and then the PSOs handle the process from there. It depends on the type of prohibited weapon. They will assess it and they will then refer the matter to police. When it comes to schoolchildren, we would then engage also with the school—either the teachers there or with the school. They are often not accompanied by a parent, so the adult responsible ends up being the teacher or someone from the school.

Mr RIORDAN: Before I start, I too would like to concur with the words the Chair made at the start of the presentation in terms of a congratulations to all the staff at Parliamentary Services. It is a very welcoming and good experience for those who find themselves working in this environment, and in recent times I have had experiences both with renovation crews in my electorate office and the security staff for after-hours matters, and at all times it has been a very pleasant and valuable experience, so I just note that.

But having said that, just quickly related to office renovations, having had an office renovation it does seem remarkable in this day and age that the Parliament of Victoria’s own staff offices so often do not meet occupational health and safety and disability access. Certainly in the case of my own office, which is being temporarily renovated, if I find myself with a sore hip or broken leg or in a wheelchair tomorrow, I will not be able to access my own office. Granted the annex out the back has made the necessary improvements to make that possible here, but it does seem awfully lagging. Do you have a comment, Speaker, on what the strategy is to get up to what anyone else in business has to do in Victoria?

Mr BROOKS: Are you referring to your electorate office?

Mr RIORDAN: Specifically my electorate office would be completely incapable of having wheelchair access.

Mr BROOKS: After it has been renovated?

Mr RIORDAN: After it has been renovated.

Mr BROOKS: That is surprising. I mean, when we—

Mr RIORDAN: Well, you can get to most spots as a visitor, but if I want to go to the toilet I will not be getting to my toilet.

Mr BROOKS: As you probably know, there is a standard design for most electorate offices. It can be varied slightly for members' particular uses.

Mr RIORDAN: I have seen the wheelchair-friendly toilets, but no, I have still got the old ones.

Mr BROOKS: They are designed and refurbished in a way that my understanding is that they are OHS and disability compliant. My office is a relatively new office—a few years old as well. It does not have a wheelchair-accessible toilet but there is a wheelchair-accessible toilet available in the building. It is not always that the actual office itself will have full accessibility, but it has to be available. I am happy to ask the secretary maybe to address—

Mr RIORDAN: It is really just the question that there are presentation talks about budget constraints. No-one else can go to court and say, 'I had a budget constraint. I couldn't afford to do it'. So the Parliament really is not in a position to say, 'Well, we just don't have quite enough money'. It is not believable. I just raise that as a comment.

I would like to move on because we want to get a few things through. Just as a point, there was much made of the concept of getting more NGOs involved. I would just make the observation that, now having been here three years and had some NGO involvement in bringing people in, it is a very expensive place to bring people into. I do not know what can be done, but I just make the observation that if we are going to have the Salvos and the Lions and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, or whoever it is, they do not have \$100 each to pay for some fairly ordinary—well, it is lovely food, but, you know, what is a fairly simple sort of gathering. We need a better solution to that.

The last question is on housekeeping, and this would be for Secretary Lochert really, is about the bells. I have raised this with the Speaker on numerous occasions. For 100 years we ring the bells at quarter past 8 in the morning, right in the middle of everyone's morning meetings. It delays meetings, it infuriates everybody, everyone complains about it and apparently for some unknown, inconceivable reason we cannot just ring them 20 minutes earlier. Is there a reason for that?

Mr LOCHERT: It is convention. It has not been going for 100 years, but certainly for quite a few, and there are a number of reasons around it. Quarter past 8 or 10 past 8 is the convention because (a) it is outside sitting times so everybody knows that if it rings at that time it is not a call to the chambers—

Mr RIORDAN: They would know that at quarter to 8.

Mr LOCHERT: Yes, understood. But to do it before 8 we have got two problems. One is our neighbours, and in particular a hotel across the street because the bells are very audible down there and we have in the past had representations from them—

Mr RIORDAN: Having missed a division, I know you cannot hear them on the front steps.

Mr LOCHERT: Well, that indicates in the past that we have. The second issue around that is that although we stage the start of staff on a sitting day, before 8 o'clock we do not have enough staff to place around the precinct to actually check that the bells are audible. So we have a person who can go and flick the switch and ring the bells, but we would not have the number of people that we need around the precinct to check that the bells are actually audible in the precinct, which is the point of the test. That explains the current practice.

Mr RIORDAN: And, finally, one last question in my time before I cede to Mr O'Brien, Secretary Budget paper 3: can you confirm in the revenue available in this coming year how much of it would be a top-up from former member for Melton Mr Nardella paying back his sums of money? Does that come through to the

Department of Parliamentary Services, as they were presumably funds taken from there, or are they funds going to the Premier and Cabinet?

Mr LOCHERT: There is no reference in the budget papers. The arrangements with the former member for Melton were that he fully repaid the amount that he had undertaken to repay before he left Parliament.

Mr RIORDAN: Right. So there is no outstanding—

Mr LOCHERT: There are no outstanding amounts in there, no.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can you confirm how much that was?

Mr LOCHERT: Not off the top of my head, but I can give it—

Mr D O'BRIEN: On notice?

Mr LOCHERT: Yes.

Ms NOONAN: Take it on notice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That would be great if you could take it on notice.

Mr LOCHERT: We will take it on notice. Yes, absolutely.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you very much for your attendance today. A few brief questions from me. Just picking up on your presentation—thank you—you have got under 'Budget pressures 2019–20' increasing relocation and refurbishment projects. In the budget can you please advise how many office relocations—total number—how many refurbishments and the breakdown or the cost of the relocations and the cost of the refurbishments, or your estimated cost?

Mr BROOKS: To answer that question, firstly, each of the relocations and refurbishments will cost slightly different amounts. We average about 10 relocations a financial year, but we have taken the approach that if we can do more, within the limited resources we have, we will do more, so that figure can fluctuate. Sometimes, as I have mentioned before, if there is a difficulty in locating a property because of property prices and member preferences, we are not able to get a project off the ground, if you like. But if there is another project waiting to go we will move and get those projects going. So it is not an easy answer to give to you at this point in time.

Ms VALLENCE: No, but perhaps I will rephrase that. In your budget how much have you allocated to refurbishments and how much have you allocated to relocations?

Mr BROOKS: Total figure—I will have to ask the secretary.

Mr LOCHERT: The average budgeted cost per relocation is about \$200 000, and the number of relocations is 10, as the Speaker indicated. We have on I guess the list of requests about 22. The process that we would use is we would go through, research and the 10 or 12 that we can get over the line first, those would be the ones that we would be completing first. Part of the discussion with government is also to try and get additional resources to increase the number of relocations that we do per year. This year we were helped with rental funding, which will make it easier to find properties out in the market, but the limiting factor is still the resources within the department to go out and do the research to find the properties, to engage the builders and to project manage the fit-outs and then the refurbishments as well.

Ms VALLENCE: Perhaps take on notice those areas where you have got your relocations. You said you are looking at around \$200 000 per relocation, and you are estimating doing about 10, and similar with refurb.

Mr LOCHERT: We would do a smaller number of refurbishments.

Ms VALLENCE: So of your total budget that is what your breakdown is for that thing.

Mr LOCHERT: Correct.

Ms VALLENCE: And just on priorities going forward, I just wanted to ask about the second last dot point under ‘Aspirations for the 59th Parliament’, sexual harassment and bullying policy and procedures. Do you currently not have any?

Mr BROOKS: There are currently procedures and policies in place for staff, but other than the general legislation that would apply to members there is not a policy, if you like, and procedure that is in place for members of Parliament and how they interact with staff. Those who watch politics overseas will have noticed that in the UK and in other places there have recently been parliaments there taking reactive action, after what you might call some scandalous situations, to introduce sexual harassment procedures and policies to ensure that people are aware, both through codes of conduct and other like measures, what their behaviour should be in relation to dealing with other people in the workplace environment and then also procedures that would follow. It is my view that we should introduce those policies carefully in a measured way before we have a scandal so that people in the workplace, everyone in the workplace, feels safe and secure in the environment they are in.

Ms VALLENCE: Just back to those relocations and refurbishes, if I could have that on notice.

Mr BROOKS: We will provide those figures, yes.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Just a couple of quick ones. DPS was the lead department involved in the alleged roting of funds from the office of former member Mr Eideh. Has there been any update from IBAC on where that investigation is at, any further advice provided by DPS to IBAC?

Mr BROOKS: The first point would be that I understand that the staff involved currently have a matter before the court, so I am not going to deal in specifics. I might turn to the secretary again—if there is any further information you want to add to that, or whether that is all we can say at this point.

Mr LOCHERT: I think that is all we can say at this point. IBAC are proceeding through the courts with charges under the IBAC act—no further advice or interaction between us and them on that basis.

Mr D O’BRIEN: To your knowledge is that as far as it will go? Otherwise the investigation is complete?

Mr LOCHERT: To my current understanding, yes. We have no notice other than the fact that it has actually been scheduled.

Mr D O’BRIEN: I have got 30 seconds left, so very briefly could I also place on record, as I did the other day, my thanks for the staff, but particularly the new annexe. As someone who had effectively a Pentridge Prison cell previously, to have a window is wonderful. But on the issue of the bells, is there any chance at all that Assembly members can have the bells for the Council switched off in their office so we can still hear the bells—I actually had that in my old cell—but not have them ringing, because, as you know, the Council tends to—

Mr RIORDAN: They are less efficient in the upper house.

Mr D O’BRIEN: They tend to have a lot of divisions, and it is impossible to make a phone call or to have a meeting while the bells are going in your office.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, everyone, for appearing this evening. I want to ask about the budget process for Parliament and the issues that were raised in the report commissioned I think by Parliament, the *Independence of Parliament* report, and the issues that were raised in terms of how that impacts Parliament’s own independence from the executive, because the process as it seems now where you put in budget bids to the Treasurer and the Treasurer can reduce the appropriation and once it is approved there are outputs that appear in the budget paper—it appears to me that the Parliament is accountable to the executive when it should be the other way around. Has there been any further consideration of the recommendations in that report and the creation of a parliamentary corporate body?

Mr BROOKS: Andrew might want to talk about this, but can I just say, as a point of principle I am a supporter of change in this area. For those members who might not have paid too much attention to the issue that is being raised, I do not think that in the longer term the Parliament really should be seen as a purchaser of

outputs from the Department of Treasury and Finance. I think the Parliament is an independent institution and should, as long as it can demonstrate accountability and efficiency to the public—which I believe we do—be able to then maturely set its own budgets to ensure there is no interference from the executive in the functions that it performs. Having said that, under this government—and I think it is fair to say under the previous government, even though I was not a Presiding Officer then—it seems to have been that there has been a good relationship in terms of the funding that has been provided. There have not been any problems. But I think for future's sake it would be wise for people to have a think about how we frame a more independent Parliament going forward. But I know that the Clerk of the Parliaments has a keen interest in this matter and might wish to comment as well.

Mr YOUNG: This matter was looked at in the early 90s by the joint select committee of both houses who recommended that the Parliament should have financial independence, but it just has not happened. As the Speaker said, the Treasury should not be the purchaser of parliamentary outputs. There are countless models around the world—UK, Canada, Scotland—that demonstrate different ways parliament can exercise true financial independence, but they vary greatly in the extent to which parliament then is accountable, because you cannot have independence without also having accountability. But the models exist, and the paper that the parliamentary library put out a year or two ago covers that very well. It is a problem that is not uniquely Australian, but it seems to be almost worse in Australian parliaments than most other parliaments. But within the Australian parliaments it is worse in Victoria than anywhere else because we have to report quarterly in order to get the next lot of funding. In any other Australian parliament they at least only report annually, so in effect they get the money anyway. So it is a particularly—

Mr HIBBINS: So Parliament is reporting quarterly to—

Mr YOUNG: Treasury.

Mr HIBBINS: Treasury.

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

Mr HIBBINS: And the funding flows from there.

Mr LEANE: Yes.

Mr HIBBINS: Right. So that would make it clean in terms of your flexibility then once the appropriation is passed—it would be difficult.

Mr YOUNG: To be fair to DTF, there is not, perhaps, a level of interference that would be of concern, but as a matter of principle it should be fixed.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you. How long have I got?

The CHAIR: You had 2 seconds.

Mr HIBBINS: The time line for the RAP.

Mr LEANE: The time line for the RAP?

Mr HIBBINS: Yes.

Mr LEANE: It is a good question, and this might sound very bureaucratic, but the advice I have had from a number of people that have entered into this is that we should spend about the next year planning the plan. I know that sounds—but getting back to it, we want to get it right, and we want to show respect to the First People of Victoria and make them feel welcome. So the time line for the RAP is there will be a RAP this term of Parliament.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thanks.

The CHAIR: All right. To the Presiding Officers, to the clerks, to the secretary, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank all ministers and officers who have given evidence to the committee today, to Hansard and also to PAEC's own secretariat. The committee will resume its consideration of the 2019–20 budget estimates next Friday, 7 June. That is only eight more sleeps, everybody. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.