



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**COUNCIL OF TERRITORY CO-OPERATION**

**WEDNESDAY 29 JUNE 2011**

**Public Hearing - Meeting No 46**

Members:

Mr Gerry Wood, MLA, Member for Nelson – CHAIR

Ms Lynne Walker, MLA, Member for Nhulunbuy

Ms Marion Scrymgour, MLA, Member for Arafura

Witnesses:

Mr Mike Burgess

Chief Executive's Child Protection Taskforce

Ms Clare Gardiner-Barnes

Chief Executive, Department of Children and Families

**CHAIR:** ... Camera please advise the Committee prior to commencing your answer. Today's proceedings are being electronically recorded. Mr Burgess and Ms Gardiner-Barnes, can you please both state your full name and position before commencing your evidence. As soon as practicable following this hearing the transcript of your evidence will be uploaded to the Committee's website but not before you have approved it. I remind Members that personal opinions should not be sought from public servants appearing in a professional capacity.

So good morning everyone, welcome to all the visitors here as well today. I just might ask, Mike give your name and your role just for the sake of the tape.

**Mr BURGESS:** Mike Burgess, I'm the Chief Executive of the Department of the Chief Minister and I Chair the Child Protection Taskforce.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Chief Executive of the Department of Children and Families.

**CHAIR:** I might just get a bit of a clarification. You gave us a briefing on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2011 which was an in-camera briefing. Is there anything in that briefing that needs to remain in-camera? Was there any request maybe to hold? So is it okay for us to quote from that briefing today?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** It's just that originally it was in-camera and we want to make sure that if we wanted to quote from it we would without having to close the place down. Okay, well that's alright with everyone there? Alright, look, I might just get some questions. The questions will go probably a little bit all over the place. I've got some questions here for Mike if you could see how you go with some of these.

Mr Burgess, do you have a Federal Government representative on the Chief Executive's Child Protection Taskforce?

**Mr BURGESS:** Yeah, we issued an invitation to FaHCSIA to be a member of the taskforce and that invitation has been taken up and the NT manager of FaHCSIA is the nominated member.

**CHAIR:** And has that person got a name or is it just a position?

**Mr BURGESS:** It's currently Dave Chalmers.

**CHAIR:** Dave?

**Mr BURGESS:** Chalmers.

**CHAIR:** Chalmers, okay. Where does the board of management for the remote service delivery fit in with the governance of these reforms?

**Mr BURGESS:** So, just trying to find an easy way to explain that. We're referring to the Chief Executive's Taskforce here?

**CHAIR:** Yeah, and it's in your ... maybe I'll put it in context here. Maybe Clare might be able to look at it ... answer as well. It says here that Clare Gardiner-Barnes said, "The other mechanism is the board of management for the remote service delivery. That's a committee that has a very broad representation and is led jointly

by Department of Housing, Local Government and FaHCSIA and has all Commonwealth agencies, Territory agencies on board. We meet monthly and part of the reporting mechanism agenda includes child protection. So there is an opportunity to raise cross-agencies issues through that mechanism as well.” So how does it fit in with the overall reforms that are happening now?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So Clare Gardiner-Barnes. I have provided regular updates to the board of management. There are other joint members on that committee, Chief Executives of other government agencies from the Northern Territory Government as well as many Aboriginal advisers that sit around the room or advise us that work in the Aboriginal areas of those agencies and we feed through, in particular, through the development of the local implementation plans that are in train at the moment to ensure that there are child protection measures under the community safety banner, implemented through those plans.

**CHAIR:** Just maybe a side question to that. Some time ago – and Marion might correct me if I'm wrong here; she will correct me if I'm wrong – in relation to some talk about the possibility of some of the houses being built by the alliances for carers and that. Now, has any of that discussion happened, especially in relation to this type of board of management, there's accommodation for people who may be caring for children at risk, as part of the SIHIP program?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I have raised that issue with the Chief Executive of the Department of Local Government, Housing Local Government and Regional Services and it's something that we would need to liaise with FaHCSIA at the Canberra level to negotiate. And also with individual communities where those houses have been allocated.

**CHAIR:** I understand there to be some issues there, yeah. Mike, what involvement both your roles and staff are having in the development of the peak Aboriginal body?

**Mr BURGESS:** In terms of the staff of DCM, my department, we've got a limited role in that other than to support DCF on request if there is something specifically that DCF needs assistance with. So we don't have a direct involvement in that component.

**CHAIR:** And Clare, have you got a role in setting up that peak Aboriginal body?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, our department has taken the lead role in that initiative and we've been working through AMSANT who has ... that organisation has agreed to take on a short term auspicing arrangement while the new peak organisation gets up and running. We have recently appointed a Chief Executive to head up that organisation and she starts in a few weeks time, and then we're also aware that there's a whole range of other work that then will need to be put in place to ensure that the ACCAs that will sit under the peak organisation, the Aboriginal child care agencies are supported. To date we have had a senior executive officer from the Department of Children and Families working offline within AMSANT to assist in the establishment of the peak organisation, starting to do some of the groundwork around the policy development and the framework that needs to be done and also the consultation with a range of communities.

At this point in time we have identified the need to go for a second round of advertisements to seek applications for people to sit on the interim board. We did get

a number of applications for that board but we felt there was some areas lacking from the pool of applicants including expertise in the youth area, for example. So we have just done a second round of advertising to get a broader pool of applicants before selection of the interim board is started.

**CHAIR:** Marion?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Just expanding with what you were saying, Mr Chair, Mike, if you would ... I suppose that across government agency collaboration and discussion in relation to this issue, Mike the Chief Minister's Department, you have a growth planning unit. What access does the Department of Children and Families in terms of the profiling of Aboriginal communities, the information or the data set that the Department mainly in terms of determining that the resource allocation, ie. not just staff but also infrastructure dollars that's required in those communities?

**Mr BURGESS:** Okay, so while one of the recommendations of the report was to establish the taskforce of Chief Executives there has, for some time, more than 18 months, been a number of coordination committees of Chief Executives that I created. One is called The Remote Service Delivery Sub-committee of Central Co-ord which is chaired by DHLGRS and the other one that's germane to this discussion is the Social Responsibility Sub-Committee of Co-Ord as well.

In relation to access to data around Growth Towns, infrastructure, what's out there, the Remote Service Delivery Sub-committee has done an enormous amount of work in profiling Growth Towns and regional remote communities. Department of Children and Families is a member of that committee and so has open access, full access to all of that data that's freely available that we are gathering from a range of sources. In relation to broader issues around youth engagement of which the child protection framework forms a part, then the Social Responsibility Sub-committee deals with a very broad range of issues and again, the Department of Children and Families is a member of that committee as well. So there is a network of arrangements that give Children and Families a seat at the table and discussion of all those issues at a strategic level but also access to data and information at the micro level as well.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So, I mean, I can understand it at this level, so when we look at some of the recommendations and the evidence and the response back from the Department in terms of completion on a number of programs in our remote communities to deal with this issue, what particularly of interest is the integrated early childhood programs, and I know that that's a DET issue but if Children and Families is taking the lead role in terms of that, what work has been done or progressing to be done in terms of our remote communities?

**Mr BURGESS:** So I might get Clare to help me but ... for some of this I'd need to have Gary Barnes at the table so that we could just explore the detail of what exactly that they are doing but we do have a framework in place to ensure that there is a linkage between what is occurring in an area that DET's doing and trying to make sure that the interface between DET and DCF is properly understood so that there can be the cooperation on the ground to make sure it does happen.

As for the detail of the program, I'm probably the wrong person to ask ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Alright, do you want to take part of that on notice and ...

**Mr BURGESS:** I think Clare might have some extra detail as well. If that's okay.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Okay.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So in relation to the progress around the integrated child and family centres, they refer to recommendation 8 and 17. So the Department of Education and Training is taking the lead with the support of Department of Health and the Department of Children and Families in implementing the integrated child and family centres. To date the Department has identified and agreed with the Australia Government the sites for the new child and family centres at Palmerston, Maningrida and Ngukurr, Gunbalanya and Yuendumu under the National Partnership on Indigenous early childhood development and work to establish these is on track. The Integrated Child and Family Services Working Group has been established to ensure high level commitment to service development and reform to enable service integration and to support the delivery of children and family services including integrated child and family centres.

In addition, the Indigenous Early Childhood Parenting Reference Group has been established to provide advice to the Department of Education and Training on early childhood services and programs for Indigenous families. To support these initiatives in communities, DET is recruiting child and family leaders for Groote Eylandt and West Arnhem region, and the child and family leaders are a key element of DET's Strong Start, Bright Futures strategic framework designed to improve governance, augmented leadership and integrated service delivery and vocational education training focussed on getting real jobs for school leavers. The child and family leaders will focus on engaging the community and building capacity while working collaboratively with senior cultural advisers and supported by the advisory board or council.

**CHAIR:** That's a mouthful. Yes. If I ask a broad question about that, because I hear a lot of, you know, there's some body been set up to do this and there's some body ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Advisory.

**CHAIR:** Yeah, the advisory or they're looking, like you said, I think checking out which communities have a certain program. Are we drowning ourselves in advisory committees and actually not getting down to the nitty-gritty, which is trying to solve some of the basic reason that we're here today is to overcome some of the issues related to child protection? Can we sort of end up being sort of top-heavy and not really making a difference, or are you saying we've got to go through all this before we do make a difference?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Well I think ... I guess there's a number of layers. It's important in the roll out of the initial stage that we're all clear about the policy framework and across different agencies we have a shared goal and a shared vision, so that what I then communicate with my staff is the same message that is communicated in Housing, is communicated through Chief Minister's and Education and Health. So there is that common and shared understanding at the start from the people in the different agencies that are leading the project and some ground rules, particularly around how we might share information. Once we get down to the grass roots level I think that's really the advisory and consultancy level that's probably most important, and that's about engaging the local community that we're here to serve.

So as we move into that phase of stronger implementation, the critical part will be ensuring we've got the right people around the table at the local community level to inform the process, to adapt the model for their local community and ensure where there are issues around the policy intent or the framework that's been set up initially, that those issues can be addressed right up the line if there's a clear line of sight between the policy intent and people on the ground trying to make the changes occur.

**CHAIR:** Could I just ask about the emphasis on the ground. A lot of the discussions, SIHIP, what do you call it, LIPS, all those sorts of things ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Implementation plans, yeah.

**CHAIR:** Yeah, acronyms. Strange things to me sometimes, but there's a lot of emphasis, of course, on Growth Towns. Now, as we heard in the Estimates, there's also a lot of small towns and there's also outstations and homelands. So is there an equal, and because children born in any of those parts of the Territory should be regarded, I presume, as equal, and have equal opportunity to the services. Now, has there been an emphasis to work with Growth Towns only or to put more of the emphasis on Growth Towns rather than the whole of the Territory no matter where you live, if it's a cattle station or whether you live in an outstation or whether you live in a little community. Has there been an emphasis one way or the other?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** If I use some of the Commonwealth funded initiatives which are really the basis in which staff in my Department are on the ground in remote locations. They work in two ways, either through a remote visiting program where they go into wherever they get a report of harm, so Growth Town or non-Growth Town, it's irrelevant. Some of the safe place staff are in non-Growth Towns and others are in Growth Towns but there is this hub and spoke model where the Aboriginal Family and Community workers in particular, if they're required to work ... if they're based in a Growth Town but they're required to work in an outstation they will go out and do visits. So they might use the Growth Town as their base but they are expected to provide a service wherever it's needed.

**CHAIR:** But that's a 50k radius, isn't it?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yeah.

**CHAIR:** If you took Ali Curung, most of Utopia as well, that's like 50ks, so who looks after the Utopia outstations, just as an example. So someone goes out to those small communities on a regular basis or ... ?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The child protection system in the Territory is really just starting to scratch the surface around its penetration into remote communities. The child safety and wellbeing teams will provide an opportunity for the first time for professional staff to be based in remote communities in an ongoing way, and that will mean one staff member in each of the Growth Towns in three years' time.

**CHAIR:** So what role would the mobile ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So the mobile child protection team is a team that moves in and out to do investigations depending on where a report of harm comes from.

**CHAIR:** So it's not related to the wheel, what did you call it, the spoke and wheel?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No, it's a responsive service.

**CHAIR:** To anywhere?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It has to be.

**CHAIR:** Yeah, but it does worry me a little bit because, you know, I think that part of the Territory's gone off the radar in regards to, you know, new housing. The emphasis is on Territory Growth Towns and there seems to be a little bit of a back in for what happens to the rest of the communities. Marion, you had a question?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yeah, Clare, if I could just go back to what you were saying, shared role, shared vision and Mike talked about the information or the profiling and that discussion across agencies. How much, and you outlined all of these advisory committees that are having this discussion. How much is that shared role and shares vision actually happening on the ground in those remote communities, or within those regions?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** It's just starting to happen now. We're in the very early stages so if I use an example of the changes and reforms we're looking at for kinship care, we're starting to do some consultations now because we have got a bit of a framework in place, it's not absolutely in concrete or finalised. We're at the point though that we can start to engage with local communities about how can we provide you with more flexible and useful training and opportunities to engage as kinship carers, what supports do you need, what are the barriers for you to do that work in your local community, how can we address that. So we're now going through a process of remote community visits across the Territory to engage specifically with kinship carers and potential carers.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** If I could just ... ? It was recommendation 117 in terms of the creation of community child safety and wellbeing teams for those communities. Where's that at?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The community child safety and wellbeing teams, we're at the point where we've almost finalised the policy for that or a draft policy for those teams. We've developed a bit of a framework, we have put out an expression of interest to recruit to those positions, or to the first five positions as well as a program leader to oversee that program and we will be ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** What will be the make-up of those teams, Clare?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So what the ... the key difference for those teams is the professional child protection worker that will be based in each of the towns that will play a coordination role, so it is 20 new positions, one in each town, and their role is really to pull together existing staff within those communities and community members. So police, education, the GBMs, people who provide youth services in the community, others who are key players, traditional elders, others who can play a key role in planning child safety initiatives that respond to the local community and can put in place a process to actually generate a direct line back into central office to get the changes on the ground that have been needed. So in the past we've had

Aboriginal community workers employed by our Department in many of those communities – not all of them – but they've been supervised by visiting staff. They will actually have someone on the ground to support them, to help advocate for issues to help bring the community together and to get a plan in place that really focussed on child safety and wellbeing across all of the agencies in that town.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** How does ... I mean, because the police and the other agencies that are part of it are going to play a critical role. What is the impact in terms of the Federal Government's decision to withdraw Australian Federal Police out of those THEMIS stations? Does that leave ... do we know (1) how many communities have been left exposed and what is the ... is the Northern Territory Government ... is there discussions, Mike, maybe this is part of your response as the Chief Executive, what is the Government's response in terms of replacing those Australian Federal Police that will be removed out of those THEMIS stations?

**Mr BURGESS:** At the moment we're going through the process of just understanding what the impact might be.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** But we know what the impact would be.

**Mr BURGESS:** Well, I just mean in terms of resource allocations, okay? There's no doubt that the increased police presence out there makes a difference, and so that benefit cannot be lost. It will form a critical part of what we create around these teams going in the future. In some communities in the future we will need them to be taking the lead, in fact. We will need to have a horses for courses approach where we can bolster resources through DCF or through DoH or whatever, then that's what we'll do but also we want to be minimising the withdrawal of police services from these communities to the extent that we can.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Has that been raised with, I mean, you were talking about your high level across agency and government coordination committee, has that been raised with Mr Chalmers who is the FaHCSIA representative?

**Mr BURGESS:** It's been raised with FaHCSIA; I've raised it directly with the Secretary of FaHCSIA from Canberra, meeting with him in the last few months here in Darwin. It will form part of our discussions as well in terms of the current consultation process that's out there being led by Minister Macklin. So that's an issue that we've raised in the suite of issues that we're putting to the Australian Government as well.

**CHAIR:** Can I just ask a bit of a practical question. I'll just ask one and then I'll come back. Clare, you mentioned that you're going to have one person there with 20 Growth Towns. There's a couple of Growth Towns that are very close to one another Kalkarindji and Daguragu – will you really need to put two people in that close together when they're only just up the road more or less? So is there some sort of ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You'd only have one.

**CHAIR:** Yeah, is there some sort of, you know, bit of common sense come into here before they just say every Growth Town, we'll put all of these services in?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So what we will do is we're starting the Growth Towns in a stage process so we'll actually use the first lot that we roll out to gauge a bit more of an understanding of the need, of the skills of the people that go on the ground, the level of support that they need, how many we need and make sure that



we're distributing them to meet the needs at the local level. The 20 Growth Towns were just, I guess, a starting point for a platform for getting at least one person in those locations, particularly where those towns may have no child protection presence at all at this stage, not even an Aboriginal community worker employed, no safe place, no safe house, nothing. So it will really depend on what infrastructure's already in that community and how we can build off that.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Do you have a, I suppose, a framework and which communities this will be rolled out to? You said that you're rolling it out in a transitional way. Do you have any indication which communities you will start from?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** One of the key reasons for us to change the initial framework that we came up with has been about staff housing. That's absolutely a critical issue because our Department, because we haven't gone into this space before, doesn't have any housing stock in any of those places. So we are currently begging community agencies on the ground, other government agencies ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** They've got no housing either. [Laughs] And you're asking them and they've got no housing.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So yeah, we're looking to, I guess, wherever we can find accommodation as the first criteria at the moment because that's something we just don't have leverage around.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So which communities have you identified that have housing that is willing to accommodate these child protection workers?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I'll just ...

**CHAIR:** It seemed, looking at that, but it's strange that we're putting all this emphasis on a huge change to child protection and one of the foundations is housing and if that hasn't been taken into account then there's a gaping hole in the provision of these changes unless that's fixed up quickly and I'll talk to the CTC afterwards, I think that that may be an area that we need to seriously say to the government it's got to be fixed quickly. I mean, housing can be fixed quickly in the sense of, you know, transportable houses but there are other issues as well, like infrastructure, and leasing, so yes, we might have a discussion about that later but you might get back to ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Look, we've had a range of discussions and other Chief Executives have been very forthcoming, and we're actually all looking at innovative and new ways to provide staff housing because currently in many of the locations we have only one public servant in a house that may have two or three bedrooms and shared housing arrangements hasn't been part of the culture, and so that's something that we will be working towards shifting.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Although if you have, I mean, you can picture a scenario, I mean, look at any remote Aboriginal community and if you've got, I mean, I could see where maybe teachers would feel reluctant to share a house with a child protection worker if that child protection statutory function is to, you know, do the work that's required. People sharing that house might feel uncomfortable because of the implications but I think it is ...

**CHAIR:** I actually had a comment there.

**Mr BURGESS:** Yeah, there has been pretty good cooperation, and that's one of the points that a Chief Executive has because what you're identifying is what we've also identified, this is a key issue going forward, not just for DCF but for other agencies as well, you know, one of the limitations around getting a competent service delivery model in remote communities is the issue of staff housing, and we all know how long it takes to get the houses, the land, everything lined up out there so we're going to have to have some transitional models where people are just going to have to share some things, to the extent that we can while we get the next wave of a new accommodation model for government employees out there.

**CHAIR:** That might have been the ... the model would be for government employees rather than just the teachers as separate from nurses as separate from others.

**Mr BURGESS:** That's exactly right.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And they all have their own contractual incentives ... you know.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr BURGESS:** And so that all needs to be brought back to a common base so that the outcomes are defined properly.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So I would, I mean, when you look across the board in terms of the placement of your workers in these communities and housing, what incentive or work is being done. If you have an Aboriginal worker on the ground in those communities and I asked Professor Vimpani this at the last hearing, Mike. What discussions are happening with the Commissioner for Public Employment and the Department in terms of those incentives to retain Aboriginal staff on the ground in those communities because the local recruit policy actually discriminates against Aboriginal staff in those ... if they're a local person in those communities, I don't know whether, Mike, you answer or whether Clare, but what discussions is the Department having? I see you're offering a lot of incentives and look, I don't begrudge incentives to try and get staff with the skill and the expertise into the Northern Territory but we also have Aboriginal staff that have the skill and the expertise and yet they're excluded from any incentives that is available to other staff that are imported into the Territory to do this work.

**Mr BURGESS:** I'll respond to that. There are a range of initiatives that are being looked at for Cabinet's consideration so in fact just before I came over here I was just looking at the latest iteration of a report back to Cabinet on the very things that you're talking about. It is front of mind with the public service but also with Cabinet, they know that there's something that it has to be unpacked because it does create an unusual situation, to say the least, and so we've been tasked to bring back some models for Cabinet to have a look at, and that's what we're doing. So that work isn't finalised yet. It's in progress.

**CHAIR:** Lesley had a question.

**Ms Lesley TAYLOR:** Again around the child family safety wellbeing teams has been probably one of the most innovative means of changing the face of the Department and its ability to have a presence and a respectful presence in communities, it's so critical. It's not so much of a question but an opportunity to have a discussion around the speed with which this is all happening, which I know needs

to be recognised as it is a priority and I know that an enormous amount of speed is ... things are taking place very, very quickly and I think that's excellent because it's such a critical part of the planning process and part of the reform process but is there an opportunity to have a space in which to trial and evaluate the child and safety wellbeing teams before the speed with, you know, that as soon as housing's available that it will be rolled out in all 20 towns. So mine's about the means of having a break, a pause to evaluate what's working and what needs to be changed and adapted.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The process for such a new initiative needs to be a continuous improvement one. So throughout the whole process of the child safety wellbeing roll out we're looking at implanting an action learning, action research type model of evaluations so from day one we have the workers on the ground collecting evidence, reflecting on their practice, looking at what can be improved, and all of that will feed into the new way of rolling out the next phase and the next phase and the next phase so that it's not going to be one size fits all model, it will look very different in every location and will look very different from how it looks now to in five years' time. And we need to be open to that and be responsive to how the local community wants to see the model work for them.

**Ms Lesley TAYLOR:** That's excellent, thanks.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I have got the five towns, that's what I ... Wadeye, Yirrkala ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Wadeye, yep.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Gunbalunya and Elliott and we're also for phase two starting negotiations around Maningrida, Ngukurr, Groote Eylandt, Yuendumu and Papunya.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** What was the last one?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Papunya.

**Ms WALKER:** So these are all places where there is accommodation identified for ... ?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** And the second one we're trying to negotiate that at the moment.<sup>1</sup>

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I'm glad you put Elliott there.

**CHAIR:** Yeah, poor old Elliott. Yep. Just refer back to an answer you gave us before regarding the SIHIP houses. I think you said the Commonwealth Government has to approve the application of SIHIP houses to carers but wouldn't that really be the Local Housing Reference Unit? Their role? So if you put it to that Local Housing Reference Group that there's a need for a house for a carer and they said yeah, wouldn't that be really the people that could decide that or is ... ?

**Ms WALKER:** But they can only make recommendations as the HRG.

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<sup>1</sup> The location of the first five sites will ultimately be dependent on successful negotiations to secure staff housing and may be subject to change as these negotiations progress.

**CHAIR:** So only recommendation.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** But they make recommendations to who, to the Department of Housing?

**Ms WALKER:** To Territory Housing.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Because Territory Housing, I mean, if you look at, I mean, Territory Housing have the leases and they are the landlord, you know, in terms of those housing precincts, so wouldn't the decision to make a decision on one or two houses being ear-marked or, you know, for people who are carers on the ground in those communities, wouldn't it be Department of Housing?

**Mr BURGESS:** The thing that I can't answer though is whether or not it's actually been put to HRG, have they assessed it, have they already made a recommendation, yes or no, I don't know if that process has occurred. But that's something that I can and will take up with ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yeah, well it was given to the CTC when we were visiting Maningrida and some of the other communities and it was one of the recommendations out of the CTC report to government to address this issue because it was a very clear request from those remote communities that the reason you can't find carers on the ground in those communities is because those carers are not supported through the housing mechanism. Now, if the Northern Territory Government is the landlord in terms of those houses, why isn't the Northern Territory Government, I mean, the Northern Territory Government needs to look at that in line with our recommendation from the CTC, Mike. It's there in our third report.

**Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL:** Marion, is that a question on notice for Mike?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, no, I think Mike can ...

**CHAIR:** He'll get back to us.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** ... he's noted it, and it's in our CTC report.

**Mr BURGESS:** So we'll make sure that there's a response to that.

**CHAIR:** I don't want to ask Marion to put that question into a succinct form.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** [Laughs] Nothing's ever succinct.

**CHAIR:** No, it's a good question, I mean, one of the issues that we were concerned about is if you're going to say that over-crowding is one of the causes of child abuse and then you put the child back into another house that's over-crowded, well, you're not going to get anywhere, so that was the background to that.

Got a few more questions and that might lead on to other questions, and another person take it, I'm not trying to play favourites here. Can you please provide a copy of the External Monitoring Reporting Committee's first report to the Minister and in your response to written questions from the 25<sup>th</sup> of May you said that Council of Territory Co-operation will be provided with the Committee's report to Parliament. Has that been done, and have we ... ?

**Ms WALKER:** That was the question to Professor Vimpani.

**CHAIR:** Right.

**Ms WALKER:** How the external monitoring group ...

**CHAIR:** Are you part of that?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I sit on that committee.

**CHAIR:** Have they done their report?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** They're finalising that at the moment, it will be with the Minister very shortly and I assume he will make it public through tabling in Parliament.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And he did undertake to give it to us when it was finalised.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Have you replaced Charlie King and Donna Ah Chee as representatives on the external monitoring committee?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Not yet, but we are in the process of finalising those arrangements.

**CHAIR:** These are questions from the recommendations, the progress on the implementation of priority one recommendations. Recommendation 14 which is on page one, this document says that at the 14<sup>th</sup> of the second, and you might have answered some during the estimates but you might be able to give us an update. At the 14<sup>th</sup> of the second 2011 there were 296 cases still outstanding. How many from the 870 backlog cases are still outstanding, and how many reports that have come in after October 2010 remain outstanding?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yeah, so the backlog that was reported to the Minister by the Board of Inquiry, the backlog of 870 cases last year, they have all been dealt with and that backlog is now at zero. Since that time, since the Board of Inquiry handed down its recommendation we have an ongoing ... a new backlog that has started of cases and they are at about 550 at the moment, 555. They ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Is that substantiated or unsubstantiated?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So these are cases that have met the threshold for investigation, and the backlog is that the investigation has not yet commenced. So there are three categories that they can be allocated: a child in danger, category one, and the investigation is meant to commence within 24 hours. They're dealt with as a matter of priority and then the next category, child at risk, are meant to ... the investigation's meant to occur within three days; and then the third category, a child of concern, the backlog are the third category and we are doing our best to try and get that backlog down but it is an issue with the constant recruitment issues that we are finding in the frontline and increasing numbers of investigations required.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Do we have a breakdown of the regions in terms of those ... not looking at cases or what categories but do we have a breakdown of the regions in terms of that 550?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The 255?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, the 550. You're saying that you've got the 250, you're saying that what's awaiting is 550 ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Or was it 250?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Two hundred and 50.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Two hundred and 50. So do we have a breakdown where the ... sorry, sorry, 250, I'm doubling your number of cases here. [Laughs] But we need to get this right. With the 250, Clare, do we have a breakdown of the regions where that is coming from?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, I do have a daily breakdown provided to me on that number. The majority of those are in the Casuarina office, the Palmerston office and then the Alice Springs office but the vast majority are in the Casuarina office.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So that'd be classified as Darwin urban?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Okay. And Palmerston same, would come under Darwin urban?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Or Darwin region?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, so does come under the Darwin at both offices. So ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And then the rest from Alice Springs?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**CHAIR:** Could I just ask, the 555, the first number you mentioned.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Sorry, two, it's 255.

**CHAIR:** It was 255?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**CHAIR:** And that's threshold numbers? Number three?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** They're the numbers of cases that have met the threshold for investigation but the investigation has yet to commence.

**CHAIR:** Do we have a backlog in the high priority and the medium first and second categories?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No, we prioritise those. So they're usually dealt with within the required timeframe, within the one or three days. The backlog in the main is the third category.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Can I just ... ?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Sorry, Lynne, did you want to ... ?

**Ms WALKER:** No, no, you're right.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** With recommendation 19 with the *Growing Them Strong*, I just want to try and ... with the 255 cases or backlog that you're talking about, Clare, the action or what was provided from the Department it was that they said cases were deliberately left open after the criminal investigation is complete and that's cases that were reported to the CAT team as they often required additional follow up action, for example, ongoing screening for STIs etc. How many of those cases or those files that were left open as part of CAT that are part of this backlog or 255 cases? Has anyone done a crosscheck whether that's ... ?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There is another group of cases that are still sitting in intake where we're still collecting information and they haven't been outcomed yet. So some of those will be CAT cases and there are a number of those where we're still waiting on police information to determine whether or not it meets the threshold. So that's an ongoing through-put.

**CHAIR:** Can you just remind ... what's the acronym CAT stand for?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The Child Abuse Taskforce.

**CHAIR:** Alright, any other questions on that? Have you got some more information for us there?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, I can give you the breakdown by office, so the Palmerston office is currently holding a backlog of, or was on Monday of 83 cases. Casuarina 85 and Alice Springs 50.

**Ms WALKER:** When you say Alice Springs 50, that's Alice Springs as a centre looking after the Central Australia?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** It doesn't include Barkly. There's only two cases in the Barkly office. So it's those three centres.

**CHAIR:** I mean, the Child Commissioner made some comments a little while ago regarding the backlog. So the answer is basically a difficulty getting staff?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** And you do say in that recommendation 14 that staff have been seconded from New Zealand. So have they stayed?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The staff that was seconded from New Zealand were here for a six month period to tackle the 870 backlog and they have returned to New Zealand.

**CHAIR:** So we've lost those.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** We have. A couple of them are returning in a few weeks time to do further work in other areas of need including backlog. We are also, we've just done further recruitment exercise last weekend through National Papers throughout New Zealand trying to recruit frontline staff and we will continue to recruit from New Zealand because those workers have been extremely beneficial to our frontline. We also have had since the Board of Inquiry 41 workers from Canada and UK recruited and a further 33 professional frontline staff recruited through our Australian recruitment campaigns.

**CHAIR:** Has there been an analysis of why it's so difficult to get people because the job is not the, you know, not an easy job? Is it because the wages aren't good enough, the conditions aren't good enough, there's a shortage of qualified people in Australia? Has there been some analysis of the reasons why we can't get people?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yeah, there has been research done on that because it's not just a Northern Territory phenomenon. Every jurisdiction in Australia has a shortage of staff, so yesterday I was talking to the Chief Executive of Victoria where we're trying to negotiate an arrangement for some of her staff to be seconded to the Territory and undertake some specific training in rural and remote work and Indigenous engagement, and I mean, she's prepared to give us some staff but she's constantly recruiting because they have a shortage and they have thousands and thousands of more kids than we do in their care system. So every jurisdiction has a critical issue around recruitment which is why we ended up going overseas to try and find staff.

It has got to do with the fact that it is a very stressful role, it's a very emotionally intense role so you take on over a number of years so you have to have a certain character about you to be able to withstand that sort of pressure over a long time. It requires very resilient staff. It requires in the Territory a willingness to go into remote communities and understand the work in different cultural situations, there are many people who don't naturally have those skills. It requires due diligence around record keeping and court work so there are a whole lot of pressures on the role that in fact cause people to burn out, look for a change. Often when they move from child protection role they'll move into another like profession and sometimes come back. They may move to the NGO sector or move to the disability area, but they tend to continue to work in social work but not in child protection as such for a long period of time because it's so intense.

**CHAIR:** Has there been any effort to look at locally grown in the sense of in remote communities? Are there people in those communities that could fulfil those positions, and I also understand that when the issue comes to in remote communities there could be family pressures on people, especially if they're related to the people they've got to investigate, or put a complaint in about, but is there any move in that direction to try and recruit people from those communities?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** It's not just remote, it's Darwinites who are long term Darwinites that we need to recruit and people who live in Katherine and Alice Springs who are long term residents who are willing to stay there that are really the people, particularly Aboriginal people who throughout our workforce are really the backbone of our Department because they stay. And so yes, the answer is we need to invest in those people, identify the leaders, identify those that potentially could



move from a para-professional to professional position and invest in training and opportunities for them, and that's certainly key strategy for us.

**CHAIR:** Is it a job that has to have formal qualifications? Can I person have prior experience, I mean, whether it's cultural but also whether it's also simply you get a more mature person that's raised a family and has some background which would lead you to say this person is stable, understands situations, could be valuable to the profession?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There is a lot of para-professionals within our workforce doing a lot of work around providing access visits to families, ensuring that we have data and files up to speed, providing cultural awareness to staff and supporting them in visits, but there is a standard across Australia and pretty much across the world that for statutory decision making around the removal of a child that should be with a qualified professional staff member. So it's really about skilling those para-professionals to the point where they can actually become a professional employee and that has got to be key role for us as an agency.

**Ms WALKER:** So as part of that, Clare, is there any investigation into developing a course that can be offered through, maybe CDU to tailor a course to meet the needs of these people who we think could make them an asset?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, that is in our plan at the moment and we have commenced that process.

**CHAIR:** Alright, just moving along, this is a little bit different, to recommendation 33, which is regarding a residential care services. Who did the Department engage to review the residential care system and have you got a copy of the terms of reference, and when will the review be finished?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The residential care service review was about to be put out to tender and a decision was made to pull it following some information that came to the Department about the company that was about to undertake that role, and so we have decided to do it internally rather than go out to tender. We have just recruited an officer from New Zealand who has recently undertaken their reform of the out of home care sector including secure care to come and lead that process. So rather than do it externally we've decided to do it internally and revamp the terms of reference. So they're currently being revised at the moment and we could provide those to you as soon as they're finalised.

**CHAIR:** Without giving the name of the company away, was there a reason that they weren't suitable to do this review?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, there was information that came to our attention that we decided it was not worth pursuing that company.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You talked about the secure care facility plan, so is that part of ... so that person'll be looking at developing or auditing?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Because that is already on our agenda because it was a recommendation from high risk audit, that was undertaken by Howard Bath a couple of years ago, and we are in the process now of finalising legislative principles that will govern the operations of the secure care facility, finalising the operational arrangements for the establishment of those facilities in both Alice Springs and Darwin. That person's expertise will assist in informing that process.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And how much involvement in the secure care facilities but also the out of home care audit that is being done is being done with the, I suppose, the mental health unit. How much is the mental health and disabilities area is working with and looking at because child protection's one aspect but there's a number of other areas. What's the case ... ?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There's actually a joint health DCF project, it's been co-chaired by Jenny Cleary and Lorraine Williams from DCF and the people sitting around the table include mental health experts, so it's a joined up process from day one where mental health experts have provided input into the service delivery model and the legislation.

**CHAIR:** Can I just go back to where we were before? Is it possible to get a copy of the terms of reference and some idea when the review will be finished?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That should have been March 2011, wasn't it? Or is that a different report? Is this another report on top of the other audit that should have been confirmed?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There was an audit done by the Child Guardian from New South Wales who did an audit on our residential care facilities in relation to the new national standards that have been finalised to determine what we would need to do in the Territory to improve our services to meet the new national standards. In addition to that as part of the Board of Inquiry we're doing a complete review of our residential care services and out of home care services in broader context.

**CHAIR:** So you'll be able to provide it to us? The terms of reference?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** And do you have any idea when you expect it to be finished, now that there's been a delay?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** That officer just arrived in the Territory last week so I would say six months for the final report to be fully completed.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** If I could just, I mean, there's a number of ... I'm just looking at some of the recommendations and just actions that have come back from the Department. There seems to be a lot of reviews happening in terms of ... Now I don't know whether this is ... we got a ... but recommendation 55 was that NTFC, now you had the New South Wales Office of Children's Guardian audit of compliance to see if it was compliant with the national out of home care standards which should have been completed in March 2012.

**CHAIR:** 2011.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** 2011, sorry. What did I say? 2012. 2011. Then you've got a number of other audits but all of them seem to tie back to out of home care, the out of home care project and then you've got another one that said that it should

have commenced implementation on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 ... yeah, 2010. And then another ... terms of reference for another review of the residential care system and the Department's looking at engaging with an organisation or someone with national expertise to undertake this project and then another review. There seems to be a whole ... and it all has out of home care, you know, audits on out of home care care and reviewing that. The one you were going to provide, is that the one overall to look at all the other strategies?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Overarching, yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Okay. I'll just tie that all up.

**CHAIR:** Another recommendation 40 and 42 on page 4, can you explain how the allowance or payments of all carers has been changed if it has at all?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The carer payments haven't changed yet. We are currently in the process of determining new models to administer allowances for fostering kinship carers. That will increase the rates of care allowances. Historically they've been set at 3% and we're looking at the new model being implemented by July 2012 with staged changes throughout this year. So the new model that's proposed, fostering kinship carers, we'll continue to receive a fortnightly allowance as a contribution towards the cost of caring for a child in their care. It will cover food, clothing, household provisions and other every day costs for a child and respite carers will receive an allowance in proportion to the amount of time they provide care for a child.

There are recommendations that require us to look at specialist carers and also the needs of the child in remunerating carers. We're very conscious that carers in the Northern Territory have not always had access to clear information and policy information around what they're eligible for in relation to reimbursement, so the first step is to make sure that that's clarified. We actually have put in place from July 1 a new range of cost centres internally within our department so that we can adequately track what is being reimbursed through out of pocket expenses, through carer allowances at the moment and also ensure that carers are all given the same answer regardless of who they speak to in the Department about what it is they're eligible for in relation to reimbursement of costs. That's been a huge issue.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** How many registered carers do we have, Clare, in the Northern Territory?

**CHAIR:** Can I add on to that question, because I've got a similar question. How many carers registered before the inquiry have been re-registered which would be interesting to note too. Because they can re-registered then, can't they?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yeah.

**CHAIR:** So did we lose some on the way?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** As at the 1<sup>st</sup> of April there were 383 foster carers in the Northern Territory. 193 of those were registered carers and 190 are unregistered. There are a further 103 new carer applications currently being processed.

**Ms WALKER:** Sorry Clare, what was that last figure?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** One hundred and three.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** One hundred and three.

**CHAIR:** Do you have a breakdown of whether they're remote or whether they're Indigenous carers or non-Indigenous?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Okay, so we do have a figure to say that there are 79 kinship carers in the Territory caring for 93 children and young people but I don't have a breakdown by remote stays.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Recommendation 46 says that ... talks about new partnership arrangement with Foster Care NT. Has that been finalised?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, so Foster Care NT currently have a partnership agreement with the Department or a service agreement to improve their capacity to deliver services and we have engaged a officer from Foster Care Queensland to provide a mentoring relationship with Foster Care NT for 12 months to help establish improved operational systems and processes for Foster Care NT. When we did the initial analysis looking at that organisation it was pretty much running on a rag and very much reliant on volunteers so there's a lot of capacity building that we need to invest in to ensure that it's able to meet the demand it has for carer support.

**CHAIR:** Who is the acting director of alternative care services? It's under that same recommendation, and can we get a copy of the business plan that's being developed?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The acting director of alternative care has actually been a position that we have done away with with the establishment of the regional offices, and so the policy and strategy in relation to alternative care has been rolled up into one position which is the director of care and protection policy and the operational arrangements will be led by the regional directors who are appointed. So the person who's the director of care and protection policy is Bronwyn Thompson.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So if you've done away with that one position or that position and you've made that across all the regional offices, so it would be mandatory in terms so each region would have built into that the business planning and the engagement with carers as part of the ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, and there will be processes set in place for regional directors to meet with foster carers and Foster Care NT and other residential care providers at the local levels, so once the regional directors are in place which will happen within the next few weeks then new ways of engaging at the local level will be established rather than having to engage centrally through the Darwin office all the time.

**CHAIR:** Recommendation 68, the question relates to that. How many children after the final audit have fallen within the category of ambiguous guardianship and what is the status of these children now?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** [Pause] We're just going to find that document, it's just a couple of minutes away.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Did you want to have a short break? We're going to ask you, do you have a problem if we go to quarter past ten because we lost 15 minutes?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No, that's fine.

**CHAIR:** Do you want a five minute break? While you're looking up that?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yep.

**CHAIR:** Okay, we might just have a five minute break if anyone wants to stretch their legs.

**[Adjournment]**

**CHAIR:** Okay, we'll keep moving on. That five minutes went longer than it should.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Could you repeat the question?

**CHAIR:** Can I repeat the question. Recommendation 68, page 5, refers to ambiguous guardianship. How many children after the audit have fallen within the category of ambiguous guardianship? What is the status of these children now?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So I can report that there was an audit undertaken of all of those children. 28 children were identified through that process and in consultation with the Department of Health's age and disability program; all of those with ambiguous status have been resolved. I'm not able to give you any further information around exactly how they were resolved but they have all been determined so the guardianship status has been determined.

**CHAIR:** And that particular category will always be there, will it?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes. Ah, until ... maybe just for a short period when a child is brought into care initially until it's determined exactly what the guardianship status should be but we are developing a policy at the moment to ensure that it's never a long term thing for any child in the Department.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Recommendation 122, which you also, I think, referred to in the estimates, it was referred to in the estimates, Clare, you said the Department had engaged in consult with Mercer to finalise the structure for the Department. They were consulting directors and managers around what the new structure for the agency will look like including staff at a regional level. Can you please table a new structure for the Department?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Hasn't been finalised yet so I have a meeting with Mercer this week and it'll be finalised shortly. So as soon as that's available we can provide it to you. It'll go online anyway so ...

**CHAIR:** Who did Mercer consult with? Was there a large range of people?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** They initially consulted with directors and then they went down to manager level including regional managers who came in for a consultation session with them.

**CHAIR:** So we'll be able to get a copy of the new structure?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Just wondering, because the ... so Helen doesn't come back to me later. We had two questions – do you want me to make them formal?

**Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL:** No, it's alright, Gerry, I've marked them with asterisks and I'll have a transcript.

**CHAIR:** So that's good, thanks. Clare, in estimates you said 445 out of 812 staff is employed temporarily. Can you give a breakdown into Indigenous and non-Indigenous positions and their location?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Did you want the ... the breakdown of Indigenous staff is that there are 99 staff who currently identify themselves through the EEO process of being Indigenous.

**CHAIR:** I think we got that breakdown.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We got that breakdown, Mr Chair, with the 99 ... that equates to 15% so we got that but I think that in estimates we had, I think there was a question in terms of how many ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The location.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** ... contracts versus permanent.

**CHAIR:** Yeah, I think when this question was done which was late at night we didn't have this information so look, I've got the table here which has got the breakdown so we might leave that question, unless you've got some more information on that, of course.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Not by indigeneity...

**CHAIR:** Okay. In recommendation 142, can you please table the complaints management policy?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, we can ...

**CHAIR:** Do we have it tabled or can we have ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** It's in draft form at the moment. It came to the executive leadership team for consultation recently and it became apparent that the establishment of the new critical investigations and practice audit team that's been established that we needed to ensure the complaints management process fitted into that arrangement. We have a project officer on board who has undertaken to review that complaints policy and it should be fairly close to completion now so a copy of the completed policy can be provided to you as soon as it's approved.

**CHAIR:** Is that the same as the new internal auditor?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No. This is a project officer who's just come on board to scope the work of the new investigations area. The auditor is a separate position that is focussed on auditing, finance, HR practices in the Department.

**CHAIR:** And that person has been recruited?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** They are on secondment from Treasury at the moment. The internal audit position.

**CHAIR:** And they'll be an independent person? Will they ... ?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Nuh.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** They will be employed within the Department and they will have an audit committee that they will report to through the executive governance of the agency.

**CHAIR:** And where would your regional complaints officers be located?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There'll be one in each of the regions so one in Greater Darwin, one in Katherine and Northern and one in Alice Springs.

**CHAIR:** Three people ... ?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And I think the Department needs to be congratulated when that gets up. I think that's important. They are important positions.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It's a good step. Mr Chair, can I just go back to the staffing?

**CHAIR:** You can.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** If that's okay?

**CHAIR:** That's okay, yep.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Clare, just going back to the staffing, your staffing structures. On the information that we were provided it said you had 20 AO4s in temporary positions. What are they? Are they, you know, AO4, we all know a AO4 but what's the duties that are involved and how long are they temporary and what has been put in place in terms of transitioning those temporary positions to full time, permanent positions?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The majority of those, I'm assuming, are Aboriginal family and community workers. They're an AO4 level position. So some of those will be funded in an ongoing way and we'll be moving to improve the process to ensure that they're in permanent positions. Because we have just done a full audit on our establishment throughout the whole of the agency and lined up people to position numbers we are now at the point where we can run proper recruitment processes for those positions. I have recently advised those Aboriginal staff, the temporary Aboriginal staff that they'll be extended in their temporary contracts until February next year to allow for that proper recruitment process to be undertaken which is commencing right now.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And how much support is the Department putting in place, I mean, we talk about growing our own and I think the Chair talked about that. I mean, you've got 20 local Aboriginal workers. How much work or resources is the Department putting in place to develop these 20 to go from Aboriginal community workers to qualified child protection officers?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There are a range of strategies in place in relation to improving our recruitment and retention particularly of our Aboriginal workers and the staff incentive package is part of that. It has provided for administrative stream staff where the majority of our Aboriginal workers are employed, training allowance. That's to ensure through their line of management that their own training and investment in growing their capacity and their expertise in child protection is put as a priority and that decisions are made to ensure that staff are allowed to attend training and access training as required, and certainly messages have been sent out directly from me to ensure that that occurs throughout the frontline.

So in addition to that we have a range of processes in place to ensure that Aboriginal staff have access to improved training. A number of recommendations have come out of the staff forum that was held earlier in the year that specifically focussed on access to training for Aboriginal staff and that will be seen as a key priority for us in the future.

Some of the specific initiatives relate to coordinated support of the staff forum, delivered training on the child protection measure and income management in partnership with the Aboriginal interpreter services, brokered tailored training for staff and we also have a learning development officer in place to look at new learning opportunities for remote staff in particular.

We also have ten staff being put through a diploma of child, youth and family intervention and ten staff through the diploma of community services, and that includes administrative stream staff.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Clare, I'm going to pose probably about seven questions, now these seven questions I've just ... one we've just covered in terms of the Aboriginal frontline staff, although there is some issues in terms of where they're paid at ... where there are, I mean, and it's something the Department needs to look at with AO6 to AO4. I think ...

**CHAIR:** An anonymous member of the public asked us to put it forward.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So these questions have been forwarded, there are about six questions. You can, if you want to, take some of these on notice but it would be good to try and get some responses and that way we can send them back to the people who put forward. The first one, are witnesses aware that all recruited child protection staff in Queensland, including those with prior child protection experience in other States or Territories, are mandatory required to first complete a four week Queensland Department of Communities Child Protection program compared to the two and three day courses offered to Northern Territory child protection staff? So why, I suppose, in Queensland they have three weeks; in the Northern Territory we give two to three days. Why is there ... I mean, given that we're adopting different strategies and getting audits done by people for New South Wales and others, why aren't we offering a longer, or why isn't it a mandatory requirement to get our child protection workers to go to a longer or complete a longer course? Program?



**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** We're currently improving our orientation and induction process for frontline staff. We have developed an orientation framework that will support new staff from pre-commencement until completion of the probation period including a DCF specific face to face orientation and suite of induction tools, and the aim of this orientation program is to provide new employees with relevant consistent information that enables them to integrate smoothly or quickly. The program also offers new employees a number of standard mandatory training sessions to ensure DCF meets its moral and legislative obligation to new staff. So we are looking at ways to improve that at the moment.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Clare, the second question, Clare. The Department of Children and Families two and three day training courses for new staff in child protection and out of home care are regularly postponed. Is there any explanation how this conforms to best practice as newly recruited Department of Children and Families staff are effectively thrown in at the deep end before any minimal formal training is given. What will be done about this?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I'm not aware of the issue of in relation to cancellation of training. When we have New Zealand staff commence at the end of last year they were given a number of weeks training given that they were asked to do a very important piece of work before they commenced their investigations around cultural issues, around using our information system, around our legislation and our policies, and they also had a cultural consultant with them at all times. So I'm aware that we need to look particularly with overseas recruits coming into the Territory at ensuring that we properly induct and provide good induction programs and orientation programs for our staff and that's something that we're committed to improving on throughout the roll out of the Board of Inquiry.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Will you follow up just having a look at where some of those courses have been cancelled or postponed ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** ... that'd be good. The fourth question – maybe I break this. What initiatives are or will be put in place for newly recruited Indigenous advisers to senior management to physically travel to all offices to arrange information seeking, feedback meetings with all available frontline staff particularly Aboriginal community workers to consult with and to gain suggestions from them on how the Department can more effectively engage with Indigenous families. Prior to, during and after children are removed to reduce the bandaid solution continuing to be applied.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I'm not sure if I got the full gist of that question but ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You can take this on notice. We can provide this question on notice. Look, it is long winded and that's why I've broken it down and I won't go back over it but we might just put that one on notice.

**Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL:** Okay.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And then we can provide that to Clare to respond back rather than having to ... The sixth one you had actually answered in terms of frontline staff.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Sorry, could you say that again?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The one about Aboriginal staff you had already answered. The last one, why are child protection frontline staff after seven months in identified instances still not issued with department identification as mandated by the Act?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Well, that's a specific case I'm not aware of. I have instituted a mechanism recently in the Department that all staff can email me directly through a chief executive's email box and that they can do that and have their issue responded to in a de-identified manner, and that if that issue relates to a broader group of people the answer to that question's put on the intranet so that all staff can have access to that information in case it's an issue for broader members of the staff so I'm quite happy to respond to any questions that staff have in relation to individual issues or broader issues that they want to raise with me directly.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** And Mr Chair, I think that all of these questions which came to us anonymously, which the Committee often gets a number of questions but depending on the issue that we're enquiring into that we make all of these questions available to the CEO so that she's able to respond.

**CHAIR:** Yes, no, that's alright.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** So if we can get those responses back, Clare, and then we can respond to the people who've put forward the questions.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**CHAIR:** Lesley's got a question?

**Ms Lesley TAYLOR:** Just curious about the take up rate of the CE's email box?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** We've had about ... it's been going for a couple of weeks and we've had about six to eight questions come in and the responses published on the intranet, so it's been a useful tool for those that, particularly during change management time when rumours can be rife in the workforce, it allows people to get a quick answer to something that ... and nips something in the bud.

**Ms Lesley TAYLOR:** The other issue that had been raised, the point of developing the Growing them Strong report was about that there had always been a very strong and very clear commitment to best practice at the highest levels within the Department, it's the translating of that vision and that commitment and those values through the layers of management in practice. So I'm just really curious, so that's another opportunity where the information can come from frontline staff directly through about things that aren't actually filtering through.

**CHAIR:** Just getting back to the recommendations and the urgency ratings. Have all the number one ratings been completed within time?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The requirement from the Board of Inquiry was that the 34 urgent recommendations all had to commence within six months and that timeline was met.

**CHAIR:** So is it possible to ask how many have been completed on the way, just wandering along, because I think part of the reason they are put under urgency

was not just to get them going but to get a completion as well or, you know, set things in tray.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** We do have the answer to that question.

**CHAIR:** While you're just getting that answer, we've been operating on this progress and implementation of priority one recommendations as at the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 and the actions on it were marked as at the 19<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup> 2010. Is there an up-to-date version of this one that's available?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There was published in this year and it was May, I think, the date. I'm just looking for the ... April ...

**CHAIR:** So that would cover ... that would supersede this in a similar ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep, so that goes through recommendation by recommendation and that's available online, or I can ...

**CHAIR:** No, that's fine.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** I have got a report that I provided to you, the external monitoring committee at their recent May meeting, it provides a more detailed update.

**CHAIR:** Would that be possible you table to the CTC?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, yeah.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** And there is a monthly update also now available online. The latest one was the end of May and the end of June will be up shortly.

**CHAIR:** Well, that could make our questions more current as well. [Laughs]

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Can I just ask a couple of quick questions?

**CHAIR:** Yes. We're waiting on an answer here too, by the way.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Okay.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Okay, so the total number of urgency one recommendations that have been completed out of the 34 is four. Of the 108 urgency two recommendations 56 have been commenced and two have been completed. And the five urgency three recommendations, three have commenced and zero have been completed.

**CHAIR:** So in the urgent number one category, are you able to say how far away from completion are the other 30? Is there sort of, you know, some close, some are going to take years to achieve or ... ?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** We have in train at the moment an information tool where we are putting all of our project plans for every one of the BOI projects into a tool called Interplan and that tool will give us the capacity to report on percentage

completion rates for each recommendation. So we could provide that perhaps at the next meeting.

**CHAIR:** So would it be possible ... this is what we got, we've just got all the urgency recommendations. Now, is it possible to have the breakdown, for instance, which are the four have been completed?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep.

**CHAIR:** You might even have some orange ones which say getting close and the same for the other ones.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Okay, so the urgency one delivered are recommendations 147, 136 and 137 and 68. And the urgency two completed are recommendation 19 and recommendation 138.

**CHAIR:** I suppose without having time to go through and see the ones you haven't got it's a bit hard to ask you questions about where you are, but we would certainly be interested in finding out where the, you know, the ones that haven't been completed, where they're at and why ... if there are any delays and why there are any delays but we won't have time in the time we've got allocated today but we'd need ... it certainly would be good to get a ... if you could send us another version of that with those areas marked that have been completed and maybe some indication of where others are at, maybe this could be categorised a little bit broader. Because I think the CTC has a role to play to see where you're at and to tell the community where you're at as well.

**Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL:** Can I just clarify? Clare's going to provide the report she provided to the External Monitoring Committee at roughly the end of May and that would have had an update on progress against all the recommendations. That table you've got, Gerry, we got way back in December, just after the Board of Inquiry had come out, and then we got the table paper from Clare at the meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February and the orange document is the Minister's report that was released in April.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yeah, I mean, it needs to understand that, understand that completely. But it would be good to, I mean, we get that, it'll be good to get an update but it'd also, when you look at some of the recommendations, the recommendation numbers and the actions that are doing it, if you crosscheck across this which is what we've got, there is still some incomplete or it's not clear just what actions the Department's done, where they're at. So, I mean, one of the questions I was going to follow on from Mr Chair was internally in the Department one of the big issues and where kids fall through the gap is the case management that is required across not just the Health Department but those flags which was a priority one urgency in terms of some of the processes across the agency but also what impact across other agencies, whether those processes have been put in place and whether the Department as part of your internal audit team is monitoring where it's at in terms of the implementation of those areas across the agency, Clare. So it'd be good to get some feedback as to what's happened internally across the Department.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So that report that I'm happy to table does go through a fair bit of internal work within the agency as well and some of the pressures that we're under at the moment and how we're addressing some of those issues.

**CHAIR:** So will that match this categorisation?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No, it's not in a table form. It goes through each of the recommendations using the framework that's been published and it outlines the progress. And it also responds to some of the issues that the External Monitoring Reporting Committee raised at the meeting.

**CHAIR:** I suppose, you know, we don't want to get drowned in reports but if you had something similar which gave you a progress of where these are at.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yeah. That's what the reporting tool should be able to provide.

**CHAIR:** Yeah. So that's a quick way to have a look. The other one provides a bit more work. So if something also could be given to us similar to that, just let us know where everything's at.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Yes?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I have a question, Mr Chair. Just one final question, Clare. Is anyone ... part of your team or the policy team that's implementing or overseeing the implementation of the reforms, is any member of that team actually looking at, and let's go back to remote communities, all of the local implementation plans that have been done for communities, whether the reforms and what needs to be implemented in the Department are fitting within the local implementation plans.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** There's a generic statement that we have, as a Department, put into, like, implementation plans for the Growth Towns, and that is that we will commit to providing a minimum level of service delivery care and protection in each of those towns. The process that we're going through at the moment through the child safety wellbeing team will be to define what that looks like in each location.

**CHAIR:** And in regards to that, those wellbeing teams, how many of those teams are actually out there now?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So because we're going to roll them out over the next couple of years, we have actually negotiated with other government agencies that are already on the ground, police, health and education in particular, to commence the establishment of those teams before our staff get there. So that will mean that they've been asked you pull those local players together on a regular basis and commence the planning process around child safety and wellbeing initiatives in that local community. So we're in the process of getting that in train without actually having one of our staff on the ground to ...

**CHAIR:** Do you have teams as such?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No, it's just one extra body and it's using existing staff and trying to get them to work better together. That's the team.

**CHAIR:** Will that eventually be replaced as a team or that'll be the team?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** That will be the team.

**CHAIR:** Just on a similar question, when I asked about the mobile child protection team. Have you got a report on how many communities they might have visited since the beginning of the year?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep. So the latest reporting period I've actually got is July to December last year which were the number of prescribed communities visited were 22. They had involvement with 492 cases and that was a drop from the previous six monthly schedule because there was some vacancies in that team that have now been filled so I will get a report shortly on the next six months' progress and I'm assuming that dip to rise again.

**CHAIR:** That'd be more one team doing that, wouldn't it?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** It's only one team.

**CHAIR:** Do they have 20 cases in each?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** That would be over that six month period so the case might only be open for a month or three weeks so might be require more intensive long term work. The Commonwealth Government has recently announced to fund an additional team from the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, so we will have two teams operating from July this year.

**CHAIR:** Right. MOUs with other agencies – have you developed MOUs with other agencies? In relation to sharing information.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes, we have an MOU with police around information sharing, around the child abuse taskforce. We also have an MOU with Centrelink to share information around Commonwealth clients and ... I'll just check. And so we're looking at an MOU around the child safety wellbeing teams at the moment with other government agencies, so DET, Health etc.

**CHAIR:** This one is a fairly specific one in relation to the youth hub. You have two senior offices at the youth triage on the side of the youth hug triage. I believe these positions are for statutory officers, is that right?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** We have a couple of professional staff and a couple of non-professional youth work staff, so a youth worker and a professional staff member are teamed up together. One of each.

**CHAIR:** Are the professional staff permanent?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes. For the permanent position, whether right today they're filled with someone permanent ...

**CHAIR:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Were the positions being filled by the Youth Street Outreach Service?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yeah, so that's that ... triage is actually the Youth Street Outreach Service. It's the same group of people.

**CHAIR:** YSOS. That's a good acronym. And they were meant to always be the service that would provide that ... those people?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yep, so they are out on the street at night, when they get a call from police they'll go back to the hub and support police in assessing the needs of that young person, finding them a safe place to go for the night. That's often their own home, it's sometimes an NGO.

**CHAIR:** I don't know much about the youth street outreach service. Is that an NGO?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** No, they're our departmental employees.

**CHAIR:** Okay. It had a religious connotation, outreach.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** Yes. So they work out on the street, they work very closely with the night patrols, police and NGOs on the street at nighttime.

**CHAIR:** Yep. And my last question, who is on the strategic reform and accountability team that reports direct to the Chief Executive ... Chief Minister and who drives and coordinates that reform? Who's the person that speaks up?

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** The internal strategic ...

**CHAIR:** Yeah, it's on recommendation 147.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It says a strategic reform and accountability team has been created ...

**CHAIR:** Another team.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** ... within the Department.

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** So that ... it's an interesting word, the team. Pippa Rudd heads up that team and she is responsible for the governance arrangements, the coordination, the accountability, the reporting, the planning, around all of the initiatives to deal with Board of Inquiry. At the moment they're being imbedded within the existing organisational structure across the agency and Pippa has a small team that plays a coordination role, ensures that there's linkages across all of the different projects.

**CHAIR:** I suppose if that's called a team, who's the captain?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Pippa.

**CHAIR:** Pippa? Yeah, I didn't know whether she might have been on the executive of the committee that runs it but ...

**Ms GARDINER-BARNES:** She attends the CE's taskforce.

**Mr BURGESS:** She's available for interactive ...

**CHAIR:** Yeah, alright. Does anyone else have any other questions?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Probably a number of them but you've kept me ...

**CHAIR:** I have kept you, yeah, yeah. You told me that was the final question before so don't make it up as you go along.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** [Laughs] I want to keep questioning, Gerry.

**CHAIR:** Do you?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, no. I need to make these other ones available to Clare.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for coming along today. I know there was a lot of questions there but I think that the whole purpose of this Committee is to be able to question you, find out where you're at. We'll obviously get together and put together a report and there might be some issues that should be raised – we'll certainly raise them. And if people in the public area would like to ask questions I don't think ... unless the questions are sort of, you know, vexatious, but if people have got questions they'd like the CTC to put to the people dealing with child protection, they're most welcome to send them to our Secretariat and we can ask them at the next meeting.

So thank you, Mr Mike Burgess and Clare Gardiner-Barnes very much for coming today and thank you to your helpers in the back and thank you to all the members of the public for coming as well. Thanks very much.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**