



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

14th Assembly

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Public Hearing Transcript

10.30 am, Thursday 16 September 2021

Litchfield Room

Members:

Mr Joel Bowden MLA, Chair, Member for Johnston
Mr Mark Monaghan MLA, Deputy Chair, Member for Fong Lim
Mrs Robyn Lambley MLA, Member for Araluen
Mr Bill Yan MLA, Member for Namatjira
Mr Lawrence Costa MLA, Member for Arafura

Witnesses:

Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet

Bridgette Bellenger: General Manager, Territory Regional Growth
Bo Carne: Director, Local Decision Making and Director, Aboriginal
Interpreter Service

Department of the Attorney-General and Justice

Gemma Lake: Acting Chief Executive Officer
Leanne Liddle: Director Aboriginal Justice Unit

Department of Health

Dr Frank Daly: Chief Executive
Rus Nasir: Acting Director, Aboriginal Health Policy

Department of Education

Aderyn Chatterton: Executive Director, Youth Engagement and
Partnerships

Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities

Ken Davies PSM: Chief Executive Officer

The committee convened at 10.30 am.

**LOCAL DECISION MAKING
DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET**

Mr CHAIR: Welcome everyone. I will use my script today. I welcome everyone to this public hearing into local decision making. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet Ms Bridgette Bellenger, General Manager, Territory Regional Growth; and Bo Carne, Director Local Decision Making, and Director, Aboriginal Interpreter Service. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee applies. This is a public hearing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. At any time during the hearing if you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask that the committee go into a closed session and take your evidence in private. We call that in-camera.

Could you please each state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing. Ms Bellenger, once you have done that, would you like to make an opening statement, or Mr Carne?

Ms BELLENGER: Good morning. My name is Bridgette Bellenger, General Manager for Territory Regional Growth with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I have portfolio responsibility for Local Decision Making.

Mr CARNE: Good morning. I am Bo Carne, Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I am Director for Local Decision Making and recently Director for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Mr CHAIR: Ms Bellenger, do you want to make an opening statement?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. I have been in session with members previously where we worked through the Local Decision Making commitment from the Northern Territory Government. Our recent machinery government changes strengthens the agency in being able to deliver on the outcomes we are seeking.

The Division of Territory Regional Growth holds responsibility for the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, including Local Decision Making and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, Closing the Gap, Native Title and Aboriginal Lands. It also has the Local Government portfolio, the National Relationship with the National Indigenous Australians Agency and—I will get the name of this wrong, so my apologies upfront—the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development, Arts and Communities. That is another important Commonwealth agency. We also have the regional network with regional Executive Directors across the Territory. All of those come together to build the capacity and capability of communities going forward.

We are happy to take questions about local decision making agreements. We have had a look at the submissions. We flagged some of those challenges and opportunities in our previous statement. We are very excited that we have five agreements in various stages of implementation. I urge the committee to visit all of those sites. The best outcome for you, as a committee, is getting out and talking to the people who are in the process. Public servants will add one lens and talk to you about the outcomes for ourselves and what we are hoping to achieve through the outcomes, but remote communities undertaking local decision making will be great advocates for the program as well.

Mr CHAIR: Today will be an open forum for questions and answers and follow-up questions. Thank you for attending. I will throw it open to the floor.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Nice to meet you, Bo, I do not think I have met you before. You said that there are five agreements. Where and what are they?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation in Ngukurr. We have an LDM multiagency agreement which involves two tiers of government and the community. They have just signed their second agreement; they moved through their first, completed the outcomes and then they wanted a bit more out of the agreement. They have gone back and we have had a recent resigning.

Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation also has an LDM multiagency partnership out at Kalkarindji and they are—I hope it is not confidential—about to sign their second agreement as well. As they worked through the first agreement and reached the outcomes, they are keen to expand what those arrangements look like.

We have the Jawoyn Association in Katherine; the Groote Archipelago—which is probably the lighthouse agreement for LDM as well—and our Heads of Agreement with Tangentyere for the Alice Springs town camps.

We have two further statement of commitments. We are working on an LDM agreement with the Blue Mud Bay traditional owners in that region. We are working with the West Daly Thamarrurr groups; that was originally an LDM agreement that was going to look at Wadeye. That has expanded to more of a regional approach. The Yolngu partnership arrangement is underway as well.

We are in 14 other communities, all in very early stages. Communities have not agreed to talk through what they want at this stage and I would be hesitant in talking too much about those.

Mr MONAGHAN: I suppose that is one of the things from the inquiries reviews. In order for us to go out and engage with those communities, we were hoping to get a list of all those who are, from this point of contact, to those who are the gold standard, as you mentioned with Groote Eylandt.

Where that is not confidential, are you able to, on the record, which ones?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, we have a project spreadsheet that looks at every consultation we are having. We have been to almost every community across the Northern Territory. Many communities are not ready to take up this opportunity. We can provide that to this committee. It shows you the stage of implementation or discussion that they are in. What has not been finalised in many of those sites—we were out at Santa Teresa on Tuesday and Yuendumu on Wednesday—is working through what it is. We can provide that.

Mr MONAGHAN: Certainly those beyond the first phone call. Those who have progressed into some formal conversations.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, there are about 14 of those.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I read, or you shared with us last time we spoke with you, that Local Decision Making came out of a decision of Cabinet in 2018, about three years ago. What has happened over that three years? It is a 10-year policy agreement or policy plan and you are a third of the way into it, what has happened.

Ms BELLENGER: I guess there has been a lot of consultation and I note in the submissions that some said we are not going quickly enough and we do not have enough agreements. Others said, we are taking the right amount of time to actually get the buy-in and partnerships that we need to make this work. Some said that we were going too slowly. It is variable.

One of the really key parts to actually make this work and being a true partnership is often, when we talk to people, they first talk about the things that they want out of an agreement. Three or four meetings later, you actually get to the true nature of what it is. Sport and recreation came up everywhere; people felt there was not enough investment and involvement and that young people, particularly in remote communities, are really interested in sport. As we work through the process, people often have not come together to have this discussion.

They are not sure what they want or what they can have. It matures over time and that is the time you need to sign an agreement.

When you look at the five agreements we have, they were well advanced communities in terms of their organisational structures, they had good governance in place—and I'm not saying others do not—but they had clear strategic plans, they knew what they wanted and you were able to enter into a negotiation quickly.

There is a lot of work to do within government. In terms of capacity building across agencies, working with public servants, Bo and I have done a couple of tours across the Northern Territory in every region, out in communities, talking to people about the changes government needs to make and then engaging in the negotiation. For example, Groote is a major piece of reform, some are about improving diversifying economies and having job for, in particular, young people. Others were moving towards cultural well-being, health and wellness. There are diverse arrangements.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is local decision making about giving communities what they want?

Ms BELLENGER: Local decision making is a continuum, as I spoke about during the last presentation, it is about involving communities in the outcome that is best for the community. It is recognising—a policy piece was put out prior to election that was about the fact people felt they had lost their voice through the Intervention and the changes made to local government.

The intention of local decision making is to give that decision back where we can and where people are capable of doing that work. Having said that, communities have the option of being more involved with what is happening in their communities from a Northern Territory Government service perspective—or they can be very involved—and then it is working out how capable a community is of delivering on that. It is a spectrum.

Mr YAN: You did mention building the capacity of the agency within the government.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes.

Mr YAN: I know there are some issues in the smaller communities, has there been any move to assist in building capacity in those communities to enable them to engage better in the LDM process?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, at least half the work that has been done with LDM is in some of those smaller communities and capacity building. We value the governance and work that is there already but often people do not have a strategic plan or vision for their community and where they want to head to. Without that knowledge it is hard to enter into a LDM agreement.

We have partnered with APO NT, which has gone out with AGM—the Aboriginal governance work—to do strategic planning and work with boards through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs funds to assist with building that capability and capacity. We are also working with NIAA in terms of where they can co-invest in getting that work done. Walangeri is a good example where they lost their business registration then worked with local government to hand back the store—local government did not want to do it, but were happy to do so.

That work has happened over the last three years and will continue over the next three. It is a big piece—it has been one of the criticisms of local decision making, in that organisations which are doing well are able to enter into it quickly but a lot of time and effort has gone into bringing everyone else along that journey.

We have regional executive directors in all six regions, their remote staff have been working with people. Some communities are not ready or interested; that is their decision, but we are working in a range of communities now on that issue.

Mr YAN: I raised this because I see some disconnect with a lot of the smaller outstations who come up through the larger communities. It is about those organisations developing communication processes from the top down as far as local decision making. That is what I was talking about ...

Mr COSTA: Too many gaps.

Mr MONAGHAN: Bridgette, you touched on the biggest one being LGANT and some of the tensions that LDM might come up against. What are you doing to alleviate some of those tensions and what are some of the other major blocks? Also, how are you making sure that it just does not become a project-based interaction or transaction?

Ms BELLENGER: There are a number of tensions for Local Decision Making. The biggest one we face is probably with local government, particularly our remote local government sector. They have real concerns about their sustainability and viability with local decision making as a policy framework handing back services where people are capable of taking that on.

When we started this journey, it was something that we were very aware of. I guess now having the Local Government portfolio in the same portfolio group makes it more keenly visible. There is work happening in the background in our policy area to look at those tensions to see whether we can alleviate them at all. There is work we can do to ensure the viability and sustainability of local government. It should not lose anything through local decision making.

We still hear the comment everywhere we go that they want their local government back. When you unpack that and work through that, the story emerges about 'We want jobs back, we want a better say and we are looking at reform through our local authority process as well.' That work is probably not very visible to the local government sector yet because we are still working through it. Our intention is to work through it.

The only place we have had a real impact is in East Arnhem Regional Council, with the Groote archipelago. They are working through a Cabinet decision about a local government presence on Groote. That has really sharpened our focus on making sure those things can work in harmony. I do not think you will see that outcome anywhere else in the Territory. It is a very different agreement with a partner which, obviously brings their own wealth to the table, which many other regions will not be able to do.

That is one of the tensions. The other tension is land councils. I have been in many discussions over the time working out how we bring them—there was a workshop with CLC this week in Alice Springs that went really well. We continue to work to make sure that the awareness is there and what it is and what it is not.

We have had feedback that the policy is a little vague. That is very deliberate because we want it to be everything it can be. We do not want to define and say, 'This is all you can do.' We want people to be visionary and really clear about what it is they would like to see for their community and what their aspirations are. The more you tighten a policy, the less likely you are to get that outcome. When we sit down and work together through it, often that worry goes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you be specific. What problems does the Central Land Council have with local decision making?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, sure. To my knowledge—and it is probably a question for them as well, Member for Araluen—are they feel there is not enough progress in Alice Springs on LDM. That is the first thing they talked to us about.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is that true?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, it is true. We have had a real focus within the Alice Springs Town Centre in our area. We have also had large machinery of government changes that have consumed some of our time. I will say that is true. That is on me; that is my portfolio responsibility.

We definitely have been out in the last three to four months with a really dedicated program of work to make sure that no one is left behind.

The issue you have in Central Australia is the scale and viability. You mentioned that before as well. Where in the Top End you often have enough housing or you have a larger population that supports a local Aboriginal organisation picking up that work and delivering it, that is a little harder in Central Australia. It is us working cleverly and trying to come together with some regional agreements that actually lets community members, in their own community, have their own aspiration and working together—not unlike what we are doing in West Daly—so that you have the scale and viability there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is that?

Ms BELLENGER: Housing, for instance. If you want to repairs and maintenance contract and you want your own Aboriginal organisation to do it, you have to be able to do so many houses to make that tender viable, otherwise you cannot afford to do it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Economies of scale?

Ms BELLENGER: You have to make a service viable. It is really working across a number of communities where it makes sense to do so; to actually working up some of those projects. That work is underway now.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why do not the economies of scale exist in Central Australia but might exist in Arnhem Land?

Ms BELLENGER: Population. Arnhem Land has larger regional areas that already have the governance whereas in Central Australia it is a little bit more isolated.

Mr MONAGHAN: On the question with the LDMs in those population centres, in the fourteen have we covered off the major population centres in all those remote Aboriginal communities or are there currently some large centres that are not part of those fourteen?

Ms BELLENGER: There are, by choice. We have covered off on all the conversations in every community. There would not be a community we have not visited two or three times. There are communities that have chosen, at this point of time, to focus on their own community and not ready to engage with government.

Mr MONAGHAN: Are they substantially large communities, or in comparison to Maningrida and Groote Eylandt?

Ms BELLENGER: No. All the large ones, mostly in the Top End, are certainly engaged at various levels. There are probably a couple of the largest ones in Central Australia which are still working through the governance arrangements. There are some family tensions about who is the right governance arrangement. We are letting that play out and supporting ...

Mr MONAGHAN: Are they part of that fourteen?

Ms BELLENGER: No. Those ones would not be a part of the fourteen, they are the ones waiting and under development.

Mr BOWDEN: If we visited one of those places, what would they say publicly in front of a committee, the reasons why they do not want to engage in LDM and they are not ready?

Ms BELLENGER: They are ready to engage. The issue is who is the right group to engage with? Bo would be saying it is him and I would be saying it is me and we would both be telling you that. Until we can come to some agreement across the community, it is hard to take that conversation forward.

Mrs LAMBLEY: One of the criticisms waged of LDM was the fact that the people in control of communities are often difficult to identify, or words to that effect, 'Consultation does not include all sectors of the community and the leadership is sometimes not clear'.

You have consulted with people who are not necessarily considered the leaders. Is that difficult at times or a problem you have encountered?

Ms BELLENGER: It is difficult every day of the week.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Talking to the right people?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. Where we do sign an agreement and we get to that point, there is wholesale community involvement. If we say we engage, you will never get 100% agreement in every community and nor should you. You would not get that anywhere in the Territory. We do not look for that, but we do look to make sure that the consultation is one of the things that has to be demonstrated before we will enter into the agreement.

In some of the sites where we are still working through what that looks like, often the leadership group will hold that to themselves and then as it builds and we get momentum, it goes out broadly across the community. It is the best process we have and we are constantly learning from that as we go. It is an important process.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You were talking before about tensions. You have: 1. local government; and 2. land councils. Are there any other areas of tensions you have uncovered during this process? To me, the obvious one is with the business sector; the potential of removing contracts and business away from the business sector and giving it to the local communities or organisation you are dealing with?

Ms BELLENGER: It has not been tension to date but that is because of the communities we are in and the processes we have done. I expect, more broadly, that may become a different point of concern as we go. Another thing is that it is a transition process as well. If we sign an agreement and we say, 'Bo wants to work towards taking over the housing contract in X community', and then there is an external provider who is in that community already, they will have good notice and we will negotiate through maybe that will happen in two years.

We have tried, in a couple of communities, to work with the current provider. If you think of the Thamarrurr safe house in Wadeye, it had an external provider providing that service. They had signed up to the APO NT principles which said as an Aboriginal organisation gets ready, we will take that over. We paid them a little more money to help the transition and get people ready to take over that service. Unfortunately, there were a few changes of governance and leadership in the local Wadeye women's group, so it never really eventuated. That is something that happens.

It is not a tension yet, Member for Araluen. I am sure that might change. Local government has that concern more than local business at this stage.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When you pass on a contract to a local Aboriginal firm, are they still subjected to the same scrutiny and level of adherence to government policy and procedure any other government contract would have?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, absolutely.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In the case where that Aboriginal business fails to deliver a service or a product, what would happen—just the normal procedure?

Ms BELLENGER: Just the normal procedure.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The contract would be ceased or ...

Ms BELLENGER: We would probably put a level of support in there if we can. If you have a local business and local employment, you want that to survive. We have tried to put an early-warning system in to make sure that does not happen. One of the opportunities might be we put staff out. The Department of Housing has done that previously where they have put a couple of staff members in a region to help support the organisation to keep going. Absolutely, if a contract was not adhered to or ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: But it would be a tough call if you signed a local decision making agreement with a community and one of the businesses that has been given a contract fails, essentially, to deliver those services and products. That will be a difficult thing for you to manage, from a local decision making perspective—to take that contract away and potentially contravene the essence or goodwill of the local decision making agreement. Is that something you have ...

Ms BELLENGER: I probably have a different view on that. It is only tough if we have not done the work correctly upfront. There is the obligation of government in its work; there is also the obligation on the community and organisations that pick up the contracts to do their part.

That is in the agreement and a contract they will sign with the agency. There is nothing there that gives anyone a free ride, or if they do not do it we will keep giving them contracts. That would not work at all.

The LDM agreement is about supporting people in their local place through business and employment building sustainable communities. If there is a contractor locally that is not working, then that community is missing out on that service, in that sense. We have those conversations. That is why the agreements take so long. We also work through and make sure they are capable of doing what they say they will ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: But things change, don't they?

Ms BELLENGER: Things change—you are right.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a long-term prospect. We have seen Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses fail. It is a fact of life. Ultimately, it is public money you are presiding over. It is taxpayers' money that has to be accounted for.

Ms BELLENGER: And it is. You will hear that from agencies as they appear before you. The contracts are no different. What is different is that we really build that capacity and make sure we work with them. We have an early-warning system of, 'If you are running into trouble, put your hand up early so we can help make that right'. If someone chose not to do that and they fell in a hole, then they would lose that contract.

LDM is not about keeping people in place if they are not delivering services. It is about better outcomes for the community. We have those conversations up front all the time.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What mechanisms do you have in place to ensure that it is happening and things are functioning well and those contracts are being honoured and delivered the way they are meant to be?

Ms BELLENGER: I think that would be a good question ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Things could quite easily become quite insular?

Ms BELLENGER: I think we have the monitoring process through the agreements and the contract has that as well. There are a range of milestones to be met and you will see very quickly if someone is not keeping up with either the number of houses they are meant to deliver or the repairs and maintenance.

There is a remote visiting service and some of the larger communities have staff in situ. One of the jobs of the Regional Executive Directors and DCMC is keeping an eye on all that. I can guarantee and assure you that we get a lot of commentary from community members about whether they think something is going well or not. Often that is the first red flag. We have a broad remote network of staff and their job is to be out monitoring and working at our LDM sites. There is a case management approach.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are they special staff or staff from housing, health or education that would normally do that or are they LDM staff?

Ms BELLENGER: They are normal staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Staff tasked with helping those communities that have an agreement?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. They do that in every community on every contract, but we also have our staff with a second set of eyes and that is from a Local Decision Making perspective; the DCMC staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many staff do you have in your section?

Ms BELLENGER: That is a good question. I am sorry, could I take that on notice?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Approximately 10, 20 or 30?

Ms BELLENGER: In this decision? No, 100.

Mrs LAMBLEY: One hundred?

Ms BELLENGER: Alice Springs have probably 20 staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Employed?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In the Local Decision Making?

Ms BELLENGER: In the local office. The office has a whole range of responsibilities, of which Local Decision Making is one.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many specific Local Decision Making?

Ms BELLENGER: We do not have specific staff in any portfolio as that would not be the way I operate. We have staff that have the ability to work on engaging more interpreters out remote or Closing the Gap outcomes. There are a whole range of activities that they would take up. If they are in a LDM community, one task would be to see how the LDM program is going. They work across a whole range of different areas in the portfolio.

Mr MONAGHAN: Are you seeing any impact, particularly with the local Aboriginal contracts, about capacity building and any evidence that it is having significant effect in building capacity on the ground?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. Yugul Mangi and Gurindji is probably true of our most advanced. In terms of the uptake in jobs employment and diversifying the economy in those two regions we have definitely seen that.

Mr MONAGHAN: What does that look like?

Ms BELLENGER: Some of their highlights was getting the contract for the delivery of maintenance and upgrades. Local decision making supported them getting the right accreditation to take up that work.—we talked about this last time. They have just opened a brand-new building which they funded themselves and it is the Yugul Mangi Local Decision Making building. That is an indication of how involved they are in it.

They have taken over the youth diversion contract in the region—we are starting to see early outcomes from that where local people are working in that space—and the transition of CDP. There is a whole range of programs underpinning their viability. I do not actually have the number of jobs, but I could provide that out of session.

Working back through LDM and education, they have now got Kriol language programs in Ngukurr School which has been a big step forward. It is the case management role across agencies in the regional co-ord groups that have achieved that. They have strategic and business plans in place, supported by government, for the first time. That is a strong example.

Where they are heading next is they feel that the economic have been underpinned in that community and now they want to go back. We have signed a new agreement recently. Interestingly that has gone back to cultural strength and respect. The Kriol language in schools is a good example of that. They want to focus more on their governance and capacity across the community, community wellbeing, economic empowerment and local jobs for local people are the key themes of the new agreement.

They have taken what they had and built on it. You will see this in all agreements. What people will sign up to in the first instance will strengthen over time and come back to cultural governance arrangements. People are thinking about treaty and other things, and wanting to get their right cultural governance arrangements in place, supported by government being ready for that outcome.

The Gurindjis have successfully completed their housing contracts. They have done the 10 remote housing upgrades, the 10 Room to Breathe upgrades and the 13 government employee housing contract in Kalkarindji. They have ownership of more land out there and are establishing a community and family centre. That will be local people guiding what that service looks like in that community to support families and community wellbeing.

They have had a 52% increase in overall cash flow, a growth in business of 16.69% and with \$3.5m increased their CAL accreditation to be able to take on larger contracts across the region.

Mr YAN: I want to step back to specifically Central Australia. We know the difficulties in negotiating there because of the various family groups and the dynamics within those communities. For those areas, what input are you getting from Central Desert and MacDonnell Regional Councils to assist in your negotiations or discussions?

Ms BELLENGER: Tough question, thank you. I mentioned earlier the tension with local government. That is a tension in Central Australia, as it is in other places. In Central Australia, to really strengthen that relationship, we have what we call a regional co-ord committee. I think you will be familiar with this in every region.

Mr YAN: Yes.

Ms BELLENGER: Those local government CEOs have now joined that committee. For those not aware, the head of every government agency in that region participates in the six-weekly meeting. We now have the two CEOs and the NIAA—the Commonwealth rep—at the table as well. There has been a real focus on COVID vaccination and some of those things where we are seeing real partnerships built. We are having early conversations in communities now and our hope is to work towards local government joining that, in a strong sense, from a position of strength.

They have assisted in providing meeting rooms. They are aware that we are out there having those discussions. A number of those CEOs—and you can probably think of who—have been very clear that as long as it is not local government services, they are happy to help. In most instances, that is not a conversation that comes up.

I am sure we need to build that relationship and keep going, which we are working on now.

Mr YAN: The reason I asked is those regional councils are in those communities and have representation in those communities. It is a point to tap into developing those relationships within the dynamics in those specific communities where there are specific tensions.

Ms BELLENGER: In local authority meetings they have all been briefed on LDM and are part of those conversations. We still have more work to do with the executives across local government across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is the tension between LDM and the councils about the fact that you are stepping on their toes and are doing the work that they are already doing? Is that right?

Ms BELLENGER: It is variable. This is probably a question for councils as well. From my perspective from what people say to me—I meet with many council CEOs and have been in a number of forums—it is more their concern that we will take things from councils. People have seen the Groote example with East Arnhem and they are worried that there is a momentum in that direction. At this point no other LDM agreement touches on council services or anything. They still hear about this a fair bit so they worry about it.

It could be a community raises that there are services provided by council that they feel could be done better locally. That would be a conversation we would have. Hopefully, we would be able to strengthen that service and maybe get a bit more involvement from local authority feeding back into the council, rather than removing it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How do you determine what you just said—whether the council provides a service or whether someone else does? Who makes that decision?

Ms BELLENGER: I am not sure I completely understand. Are you asking me who runs services in remote? Is that the question?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, no. You said that there might be a question about who could provide services better. Who makes that decision? The community?

Ms BELLENGER: We would together; it is a partnership. If someone said to me, 'I want to run all of the services that are currently run by the council'—it might be a local Aboriginal organisation—then we would look at that. Mostly, councils have a scale and they do that across a region which makes it viable. It would be very hard for an organisation to pick that up.

We would have the conversations. It might not be that they run the service. Local people, through the local authority potentially, would have a better ability to talk about how that service works in that particular community. Remember the continuum of LDM. Some of it will be, 'We want to take over the service and run it', others will be, 'We want a better say in how it is happening in our community'.

Mr CARNE: I will add that if it comes down to if the community is really happy with that sort of service and their level of involvement, there is less likelihood they will want anything changed in that service delivery aspect.

The other part is, even where there is some concern about wanting to have more ownership of that service, those conversations may lead to how you make this viable at the community level. Central Australia is a good example if you look at a cluster approach. If you have agreement with other nearby communities and homelands, it might be more viable that way. We are probably a long way away from that.

Mr MONAGHAN: Of course, those local councils would be very worried that they would be losing their funding for that aspect of their current agreements because it would be going back to the local community from government.

Mr CARNE: Yes, the conversations about whether it is the local councils, businesses or non-Aboriginal organisations potentially losing something. You have to try to flip it around to see what the communities can gain out of it. If you can see that there is benefit in that, then that is the sell on it.

Mr CHAIR: Could you give us an example—say, in Central Australia—of that? More of a concrete example? I am trying to get my head around it.

Mr CARNE: Probably not Central Australia

Ms BELLENGER: Probably I can. In Central Australia conversations we have had in the last couple of weeks have been about children and family services. Communities feel that they are not being run in an appropriate way. You have someone driving in for the day and driving back out. They feel that there could be a much better service run.

Local people in the community know what is happening. They will know if kids are not at school because the families have had a dispute overnight, or there has been something else. They want greater involvement in being able to put that side of the story, rather than government approaching it from 'Your child is not in school; they have missed five days.' They want a better engagement. Education has been very open to this approach.

That probably will change service delivery in some of those areas. You might have an overarching provider, as Bo was talking about, but then have local staff, with each achieving a better outcome. That is one of the things we are looking at in Kalkarindji as well.

We have to recognise that a lot of the things that governments, at all levels, have done in communities, have not made a significant difference. Where we are in many communities is where we have been for a long time—the thought of local people having more ownership of what a service looks like. The funding quantum will stay the same, it will not

cost more, but we step back and say: 'what do you think will work and how should it happen'. There can only be benefit from that. If we keep doing what we are doing, we are going to keep getting what we get. We see the consequences of that across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much funding do you get Bridgette, within your section?

Ms BELLENGER: We have the staffing base across the division and we also have a \$500,000 grand fund. That grand fund is used across the Territory for some of the strategic planning, visioning and accreditation. It is a flexible fund, as long as it is supporting a Local Decision Making; for example, paying to bring the Yolngu leaders in to a central place on two occasions to work through what their agreement may look like.

The other funding comes from agencies, out of their normal bucket. If they are housing contracts, education providers et cetera. Some agreements, particularly in the Big Rivers area, has Commonwealth funding and programs. We are hoping to expand that across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How do you allocate that \$500,000?

Ms BELLENGER: Very carefully.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is it enough?

Ms BELLENGER: It is enough for now, thinking that there is also a quantum of funding in agencies as well. We also work with the Commonwealth on anything they might be able to contribute and assist with. It is assisting to bring LDM agreements to the point where they are actually able to be signed. It is an important bucket of money.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is it spread fairly across the Northern Territory?

Ms BELLENGER: It is spread where the need is; the need is different in different parts. All regions get funding.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am thinking if Central Australia is not progressing as quickly as the Top End, are you spending more in Central Australia of that \$500,000?

Ms BELLENGER: We are now, but we have not always. We have got the first agreements people who were ready to engage. We put a lot of funding into that region or regions. Now that Central Australia is coming on line, they get first go at the funding.

Mr MONAGHAN: Has each department got a line item for this?

Ms BELLENGER: No. I do not think they should. That may be a different decision to what you make here but they use their own budgets in terms of housing contracts. They do not have a separate line item and I do not think they need one. It is how they change the service and provider.

Mr MONAGHAN: How they operate?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is an example of some funding you have spent in Central Australia recently?

Ms BELLENGER: Where a community has done their initial engagement and they want to have an LDM agreement, we have done the initial part with government. We then step back from the process and pay facilitators, of their choosing, to work on their strategic plan or the LDM agreement.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you say where that has happened?

Ms BELLENGER: I would rather not right now. In a couple of months I would be able to give you those figures and numbers. In the Barkly and Central Australia we have some dedicated funding to bring LDM agreements to a close.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you put out an annual report?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, it would definitely be in there. It is just recent expenditure and we are still working through grant agreements and on the ground. That is why it is not quite ready to have that discussion yet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have had \$500,000 for the last three years?

Ms BELLENGER: That is correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: For each financial year?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. Some of the funding in the first year went to Charles Darwin University. They are building a longitudinal study and long term research project about how LDM is working—Bo manages that contract. Did you want to talk about that?

Mr CARNE: Yes. We have stage one of a monitoring evaluation program set up with Charles Darwin University GroundUp team. This was a pilot program that engaged with, I think, Kalkarindji and Tangentyere. The main purpose being to test to utilise local people to self-monitor evaluation to build up capacity in those communities.

Stage two was a similar approach to those LDM agreements, the five under implementation, but focusing on the feeling within the community about the LDM agreement. Asking the community if things have improved, stayed the same or gotten worse. The other part was the process and if the community feels the government followed those LDM principles during the negotiation process. We are in early discussions within this stage, about four to six weeks. We are expecting the report out by end of June next year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much did you allocate to that? How much did the longitudinal study cost CDU?

Mr CARNE: About \$100,000

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. I think across two separate financial years. I think one was \$120,000?

Mr CARNE: Yes.

Ms BELLENGER: We could get you that exact figure.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes. How much are the salaries, the operational funding?

Ms BELLENGER: I can provide that number for you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many people do you employ?

Ms BELLENGER: The division is large, in the regional offices ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: LDM?

Ms BELLENGER: In LDM we have two full time project officers. Both the director, who is paid at ECO 1 and an A07 project officer ...

Mr CARNE: Specifically a project officer. In the early stages of the LDM we had a larger team while we built the framework, policies, consultations, talking with different agencies and running workshops. Now that the regions do their own implementation, the project officer and I provide a support role, collating, reporting and so forth.

Mr CHAIR: It is multifaceted, across agency program policy area? I admit I have not looked at your annual report. Sorry. We should get a copy.

Ms BELLENGER: Absolutely. I am surprised it has not come up in the estimates. I was ready for it every year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Well next year.

Ms BELLENGER: Okay, thank you.

Mr CHAIR: I am about to google it. In a utopian world—with treaty, with the feds contributing—what does it look like across agency? How does that work and then how do you measure that? Because we keep doing the same thing and getting the same result. I grew up in Alice Springs—I am looking forward going to have a visit and tour in Tangentyere next week—and 25 years later I am looking forward to going to Charles Creek. That will be interesting, but what is the vision?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. I am really passionate about this area, I also grew up in Alice Springs. I have lived in the Territory all of my life. I have kids and grandkids here as well. I have lived across many regional towns. This is my personal view and the thing that drives me at work every day. We have to do it differently and in partnership. We have not really done that. We have had a number of goes with well-intentioned policy. This is the best policy I have seen for sitting down and engaging with Aboriginal people. We do not walk into a community and say, 'Would you like an LDM agreement?' or 'What do you want in your LDM agreement?' We do not even have a conversation about LDM.

We try to say, 'What should your community look like? What are the things that are really problematic for you? What are the things you would like to work with government to change?' That is always our starting premise. For us, no one in the Territory has a good life until everyone in the Territory has a good life.

We start with a conversation about, 'What it is we can do to work with you about making things better?' A range of things come up from those conversations. COVID has been an interesting time for people and people are looking at things with a different lens than they have previously.

The point and vision for LDM is to empower local people in their own community to have a voice, be able to talk about service delivery and have some ownership and responsibility as well. This is also about accountability, 'We are happy to put these things on the table, but here are the things you need to deliver from those things.' That is what a true partnership is.

Some communities are more ready than others to do that. For me, the vision is that people are involved—and this should be all over the Territory, not just remote or Aboriginal communities. The best decisions are made locally. You could make a decision in Darwin to build a road somewhere, but local people ask, 'Why are you building it there? You really need it here.' They should be more involved in that decision making. You will not see change—kids fully at school, people in jobs and employment—until people feel that they have a real voice and are more empowered in the community. That is what this policy is aimed to do.

Mr MONAGHAN: With that vision you have outlined, Bridgette, how do you then respond to the criticisms that APO NT, the treaty commission or LGANT have submitted to us?

Ms BELLENGER: Every view is valid. We appreciate that feedback. We have since met with the treaty commission. That has come into our purview as well as Aboriginal Affairs. We have been able to have some of the conversations that we now see we should probably have had 12 months ago. We do not know what treaty looks like yet; that is still a work in process. Is the end goal people having local governance and self-determination and so on?

LDM can start that work. It is unpacking it and working through it. There is greater synergy between the treaty office and us. We will keep building that to make sure there is a process that works.

Regarding APO NT, that has been an interesting process. They were involved very early. I feel that the tension, as I recall it—Bo might have a different view—was we were putting it in and they were saying, 'No, we still want to keep talking about it.' There were communities ready and government was ready, and we needed to make a start and learn from the process as we went.

Mr CARNE: Yes, I thought it was where you could look at trying to build capability, really do some work about governance and leadership and testing that in those organisations, but some of them would probably feel that by saying, 'We want to test this with you and get someone to come and do an assessment of it', you were disrespecting them because they had such strong governance and leadership already.

I do not know if it was meant to go that far, but that is the feel I had. As Bridgette said, these ones we have in place were done quite early because they were ready. They know this was coming; it was all building up to this. They were doing it anyway and it was just more or less formalising it in policy.

Mr MONAGHAN: Would you change any of that methodology then? Obviously, the core of that is criticism of methodology. In hindsight, would you change any of that?

Ms BELLENGER: I would not, no. Maybe we should have spent more time in communities that were wanting to do the LDM process earlier. There are things I would change about it, definitely, in perhaps more regular engagement. We are meeting every six weeks or something like that.

In terms of the rollout of the program, we are doing all the things that APO NT had asked us, but we were ready to go into some of the communities which were ready. I do not think that was a mistake. There is a lot more work to be doing on capacity building. Closing the Gap with the strengthening community organisations and the priority reforms will move that along. If we kept working on capacity building and determining leadership arrangements, that could be done for a long time and sometimes it is just as good to learn from the learnings you get from actually being in the process. That was a point of difference.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Bridgette, with the agreements, who actually drafts the agreements?

Ms BELLENGER: That is where agencies are involved. We often get an independent facilitator from legal firms to do that on behalf of communities, when needed.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where do we find the annual report? Is it a separate report?

Ms BELLENGER: For LDM?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Ms BELLENGER: It would be in the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet annual report. I am not sure if agencies actually pick on it as a section, they may not. The annual report will reflect the expenditure and staffing information on LDM.

Mr MONAGHAN: Are you happy with the pace that this rolling out. It is a 10-year program, you are three years into it and you have 14 which are not on the plan but 14 which are travelling along that line? If not, how can this go faster?

Ms BELLENGER: I am happy with the progress. Governments often go to KPIs and targets, but if you did that you would get a piece of paper. I could get you 14 LDM agreements tomorrow if that was my target. If you want real growth and change and if you want communities to be really involved in the planning, that is always going to take time. We are seeing now that there will be a number emerge at the same time and build numbers. The time we have spent over the last three years engaging with communities and working through those processes is meaningful. We could not have done it differently. If the outcome you want is for communities to be leading this work—for us it is—if you do not want an LDM agreement, that is fine. No-one has an issue with that except some of our critics that say we should have more.

It has to be a community-led process to make it worthwhile. I am happy with the pace it is working at, I am confident that our teams are out there having the right conversations and it is preparing agencies for better growth at the same time. This is real reform, the agreements we have are real reform. It lets business see the intention of government and give it time to look at their planning. The change of pace is right.

Mr MONAGHAN: When we head out to some of those communities, would we expect to see that the whole conversation has filtered down to the person in the community so they understand the changes that are going on or would we expect that knowledge to be stored with one or two people?

Ms BELLENGER: Certainly more than one or two people, I think at least half of a community would have an understanding of negotiations. The fact that Yugul Mangi has a local decision making office and boardroom is an indication. Not everyone in community. The same if you asked them about any government—they would have an understanding of it. That does not mean they have not been engaged in broader community forums. I have been in a number of communities where there have been a whole range of meetings with community members. Some communities have different working groups and different members are engaged in that way.

As I said previously, we do not make LDM the feature of those conversations. That is the vehicle by which we move forward. You might ask people if they know about their LDM agreement, and they do not. 'Do you know about the changes that have happened in your education system?' 'Yes, now we have Kriol in school.'

That will be the interesting part on community for you. We definitely do not say, 'Do you want an LDM agreement?' because that is not the point.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A lot of the feedback we got was that there seems to be a lot of uncertainty about what it is. You have acknowledged that. You said at the beginning that you have deliberately kept your definition obtuse. You want to be inclusive rather than overly definitive about what you are doing.

That is a bit of a problem in itself, is it not? If Aboriginal people from Aboriginal organisations around the Northern Territory are a little unclear about what you are doing, that is a problem in getting people on board. I wonder if there is some effort to do a bit more marketing, promotion or community education about what you are doing, generally for everyone. Non-Aboriginal people will not have a clue about this. They might understand community control, but the local decision making label is not out there in mainstream much at all, I do not think. I wonder what work you are doing to spread the word more broadly.

Ms BELLENGER: Thank you very much for that question. You are right; we need to do that. Some of the submissions highlighted that. We already knew that and we have some plans in place.

We would like to get some of the people from the LDM sites doing some of those conversations for us. COVID has prevented that in the last year. We had plans where we would use people who had an LDM agreement to go to other communities to talk to them about it.

To me, that is the value. It is probably not government, but we will also—as Bo and I have done previously—go back on the road shortly where we can and call community meetings—urban—so people who have an interest in it—if I get one person or 20 turn up I am happy to talk to them about it. We will do that in each regional centre and then we will do some broader stuff with public servants, which is what we did at the start. We had hundreds, 1,000 people ...

Mr CARNE: Yes, we had open forums across the NT.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, bringing public servants into a room, all together—we do not like to do that by agency, we want there to be a cross section—and talk about why we are doing this and the reasons behind it and what their roles are in it, and provide more detail and information to them. Hopefully, they are our barbecue champions who will then go out. We did that right at the start, but we did not really know what it looked like.

In broader forums, we would be open to Chamber of Commerce or anybody like that which would be interested in a presentation or discussion about it. Bo and I together presented at numerous—probably hundreds over the years, haven't we?

Mr CARNE: Yes, I stopped counting, I think after the early 90s the different briefings. That was in the first 12 or 18 months.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, mostly. We are ready to do that again. We have a bit more of a story this time going forward about, 'This is what we thought would happen and this is what is happening'. You will see that over the next six months.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is interesting for me. I had no idea that Tangentyere Council has a local decision making agreement with the Northern Territory Government. I did not hear about it at the time. When I looked into it, it was signed about a month before the 2020 General Election. It has obviously gone under the radar. Without a local paper in Alice Springs, you do not hear about this sort of stuff at all.

It is important that people in Central Australia—and definitely people in Alice Springs—know that this is happening in Tangentyere. It is a good news story for them. It has implications across the community. It is important that we know what is going on, more broadly across Central Australia. That is of interest even to the communities that are in the consultation phase.

I urge you to try to get your message out generally, not just to public servants but to the public, so that we can get behind what you are doing. It is good stuff. We have heard broadly that there are lots of teething problems but generally people do get what you are trying to do, but if you are not conveying it in a particularly or broad manner then I think you are doing yourself a disservice. That would be my observation and feedback.

I cannot wait to get to hear what Tangentyere have to say about their experience and what they are doing. As local members, we have responsibility for those, it is not just local government, as elected members they are our constituents and we are interested in what is happening. There is a general lack of communication, I do not know whether you have any comments to make about it.

Ms BELLENGER: We certainly take that feedback on board. As indicated, we already have a plan to go out and do that. I am confident, without speaking for the Minister for Local Decision Making, Minister Uibo, if you wanted a briefing we could perhaps go into more depth than we would in a public forum, about all the things that we are doing.

Mrs LAMBLEY: But you only know what you know. I did not even know that there was a Local Decision Making. I cannot ask for a briefing if I do not know. That is just the nature of the beast in Central Australia at the moment. Is there any secrecy around anything you are doing?

Ms BELLENGER: No.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there anything you are deliberately withholding or communities do not want the broader population to know?

Mr CARNE: I guess if anyone wants to have a look on the LDM website, all the agreements are posted on the website and that has been deliberate and driven by the community leaders to say: 'we want everyone to know what it is, so we are being open and transparent'. It also helps in the eyes of the community partner, is that they have something to take government to account. Everyone knows it is there. You are right, it is on a website, but if people do not know to look for it, they will not know.

Ms BELLENGER: It is 13 languages as well ...

Mr CARNE: Sixteen languages.

Ms BELLENGER: Sorry my mistake. We have probably done more work in remote advocating than we have in regional centres and we take your point.

Mr MONAGHAN: A question going back to talking about where non-government agencies are not part of these agreements but expected to adhere to the principles in working in communities. You have all your agreements that you are currently working with the service delivery that needs to come from those and whatever they look at. What proportion of those are not either government agency or local Aboriginal corporations and what proportion is left over. What is the quantum we are talking about some other company that is not an Aboriginal corporation that is in these communities, engaging in the service delivery agreed?

Ms BELLENGER: I could not answer that question off the bat, but it would be very low. Most of the community agreements to date—there will be some change in Groote—already had strong developed organisations were doing that work. Some of the service providers that were there from outside of the community, had signed up to the APO NT principles, which we thoroughly endorsed, had in their contracts the clause that they will exit on local Aboriginal community building, their capacity to do that service. We encourage that for all our providers.

Mr MONAGHAN: My assumption is they will be the more technically orientated service deliveries that even, across the Territory, we genuinely get in from Darwin?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, that is correct.

Mr COSTA: Within my area of Arafura, how many communities have you consulted, or are you looking at, for LDM agreements?

Ms BELLENGER: We are in a number of them. We have consultants out and we are getting ready in Tiwi as you know. They have come back and forward about whether they wanted an agreement but now they want to do a lot of that work. Maningrida is also working towards its outcomes.

We have been in almost every one of your communities two or three times, having the discussion about what local decision making and community aspiration could be. We are probably only working in larger communities at the moment on an outcome. One of the things we hope for, Member for Arafura, is that as people see communities take up the LDM and see benefit from it, others will engage more strongly in the conversation.

Mr COSTA: Is LGANT part of that consultation process?

Ms BELLENGER: We have done a presented to LGANT a couple of times about LDM itself, but no, they have not been out on the ground with us, to my knowledge.

Mr COSTA: The biggest problem I am facing in my community is we have the regular council, then the local authorities and the other layer is the housing reference groups. There is a lot of confusion amongst board members and members in regard to whether local authority makes the decision on allocation of housing, or does it come back to the housing reference group? There is a lot of tension because some of those board members are board members on the housing reference group and local government. It is very hard.

Is there any way we could look at strengthening that relationship?

Ms BELLENGER: Absolutely. I will be with Minister Paech this afternoon having that very conversation. He is a very strong portfolio holder of Local Government. It also recognises the importance of building a better relationship and clarity. That was the policy work I referred to previously—what is the role of those groups and whether it is LDM or something else?

Mr COSTA: Liaise across the authorities.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. Do we put in some scenarios about how those different things might work together more closely? There is some policy work under way having a look at all of that right now. Maybe that is the thing we should have done a couple of years ago. We acknowledge and recognise that. It is certainly work under way now.

Maree De Lacey from Local Government is very experienced and considered leader for local government in the division.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A random question. As part of the local decision making, could that include the control of water for communities?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, it could. Anything within the current policy framework, I suggest. There is a water strategic reserve policy. If someone using LDM as a governance vehicle wanted to determine how that water was used, I cannot see anything would stop that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How do government statutory responsibilities fit in with this? At the end of the day, government has to retain some control over some things. One of them, I would have thought, would have been water.

Ms BELLENGER: My comment was that there are different parts of water. The water allocated under the Aboriginal reserves—we could build capacity about how you use that allocation. The statutory role of government always remains.

A clear example for us is that there were a number of communities that wanted independent schools. While they have moved back from that because they feel they have enough involvement under LDM, there will be some communities that take that up.

Their obligations do not change. They have to deliver the service. It has to be within the legislation. LDM does not change any of that. It lets local people run a service within those parameters—in a way that suits their community—to a better outcome.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is a continuum with that, is there not?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Some government services could be almost fully managed by a community, whereas others cannot. If there is statutory, no, For example, most health services are not of a statutory nature ...

Ms BELLENGER: Well, they are. From the Commonwealth? Independent ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: My point is there are some things that can be easily managed but there are others that could not. Who says no? Who says no to a community about the transfer of services?

Ms BELLENGER: That is part of the negotiation; it is part of the reason it takes so long.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The outcome is not necessarily yes, is it?

Ms BELLENGER: The outcome works towards yes. If a community clearly does not have the capacity to deliver a service then we will not hand that service over. We may agree to, in the first five years, imbedding people within the organisation with an intent to take it over at a future date. There are agreements which have that in them.

You will find with agencies coming in, the contracts are not different. They are still deliverables and performance management. None of that changes. It lets local people be better engaged about their own communities.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, I understand. The time frames can be lengthy? I was a part of community-control negotiations, many years ago when I was minister, and some of those projects still have not come to fruition. So has the time frame been made clear that this may not come about within the next five to 10 years? But it is a process you are working towards.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. The difference now—you are right, it is complex and communities can be up and down as well—with the LDM agreement is you have a sign post saying that is what we are working towards, that is all agreed. And DCMC is supporting that process as with agencies as well, because there is a clear agreement.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is probably no different to what it was when I was a minister. There were clear agreements in place. You have remarketed it and given it more strength. This concept has been around for a long time. It is not new, is it? How you are approaching it probably is.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. Your comment earlier, that it has not changed and that the outcomes we were looking for were taking a long time—I think the additional support, in particular from a central agency and with money, all helps. We can pay a consultant of their choosing to take that aspiration forward. Previously it has been done as government or left it to communities and that did not have the same focus and strength.

That is what I would argue would be the difference and I think it is critical.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Developing strong governance within communities is sometime very difficult, is it not?

Ms BELLENGER: It can certainly take time. I think government is best left supporting communities rather than trying to do it for them. That is certainly what we have seen. That would be our view.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not think many would disagree.

Mr MONAGHAN: Does it have the same level of rigorous, something like an RPA had with the implementation? Basically three tiers of government—then said, 'How far are we this month?' Does it have that level of ...

Ms BELLENGER: Yes it does.

Mr MONAGHAN: Can you tell me about what that looks like?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. There are implementation groups for various parts, I will use Groote as that is the most progressed. There are the partners and government agencies at the table every four to six weeks working through milestones—a whole plan. Under each are six key priorities, then there is a definite plan under each about how you get there.

Agencies and the partners—sometimes that is just communities, other levels of government or external bodies. They are all a little different but their role is to land the implementation plan, negotiations and meet the milestone. Sometimes we push those milestones back if they are not ready but it is something we monitor and get involved in. Part of my role, as the general manager, is to get engaged and start working. It goes up through our chief executive coordination group on a regular basis and then up to Cabinet as it progresses.

Mr MONAGHAN: Is the reporting of those milestones publically available? Like a traffic light system, this is how we are going, are we on target? Or the red one, are we having issues?

Ms BELLENGER: I do not know that it is.

Mr CARNE: Only the implementation plans as they are signed off are put on the website.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. It is reported to Cabinet and the Minister for Local Decision Making. We meet monthly on local decision making.

Mr MONAGHAN: How would a community member have confidence in knowing that what they have been engaging—say, for the last three years if it is a group one; I am assuming this could be going that long—and they are getting where they need to be?

Ms BELLENGER: We would expect the community partners to be feeding that back into community as part of their role, rather than government. There are some really sensitive negotiations as part of it. Some of it is commercial-in-confidence. I do not know that we would display that publicly, but we would be able to provide advice on where it is up to if required.

Mr CHAIR: Reporting is interesting—what you can and cannot report. If this is a longitudinal policy—we are talking about 10 years now and generations—how do you report on a top line—say a macro and a micro. A macro might be in a community, but there is also micro in the community. That would seem to me to be one of complicating reporting systems if you have 14 or more currently and everything has to be put in place. Do you have a macro reporting structure?

Ms BELLENGER: We do internally, but not publicly. The CDU is working the strategic intensity of the program and whether it delivered as per the agreements, and whether all players were accountable and perform as they should have. At that level, we are still bedding it down, but have a bit of a framework we are working on.

Mr CHAIR: I contend that on a macro level for the Territory, there are four or five areas I would like to know. Is incarceration being reduced? Is that a result of X, Y and Z? Has school attendance gone up? Is the gap being closed between Indigenous people and others? What is life expectancy? What is infant mortality like? There are some big top-line numbers we potentially are all feeding into, as a government across agencies.

It goes to your point earlier, Robyn, about marketing. You want to celebrate your wins. Sometimes in this space there are not many wins. The time it takes to get to an end is really a tough slog, which is what I have heard today. It is more of a comment, in many ways. Can we find some top-line stuff that is not sensitive or commercial-in-confidence that we can then report on and champion?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. The work we are doing on Closing the Gap is that top-line story across the Territory. With that information, we will pull out the LDM communities and see if they are travelling any differently to others. That is probably 12 months to two years away, to be honest.

Mr CHAIR: Or five or 10, or ...

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, you would measure it, hopefully, on an annual basis. We have our data. Minister Uibo has been very clear about her direction about that level of reporting and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs group. We have had the implementation landed now. There is whole-of-Territory data against a lot of those socioeconomic factors being collected, or already collected. We issued a report recently.

From there, with the CDU work, we will drill down. Even if an LDM agreement does not feature on education, for instance, did the empowerment in other areas make a difference to that? That is something we are keen to learn and one of the outcomes we are looking for.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, and there is quality of research you can report on, which will not tell you it went from one to two, or two to three. It is, here is how the communities function. That sort of research and feedback for a committee like this would be great. I am not asking you to grab it today.

I talked to the committee earlier. If you can measure it, sometimes you cannot always manage it; sometimes you can.

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. There are key performance indicators against the implementation plan for—if you look at the two recent agreements we have signed again—one signed again and another about to be. They showed all the things they wanted and the outcomes they had. That is reported.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Did you start with a baseline assessment?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. They are quite narrow agreements in terms of what they wanted delivered, but we do have a baseline assessment.

The other work we have started, is working with our treasury and some stakeholders on a cost-benefit analysis. This will have to take place over many years. Was it worth doing and was it valued? Looking at those changes, often it might

cost a bit more to set up a program at the start but then you can see that empowerment and more people in jobs, did that lead to a cost against health and policing? We saw that in Wadeye. I talked to that data at the last committee hearing.

Mr CARNE: That is at the stage of setting up with some sort of data matrix. We might be too early for the full cost-benefit analysis understanding but having that framework ready—it could be in one or two years' time—we can have the data matrix work around it. We can look at pre-and-post-LDM to see if anything has changed.

As you were saying, sometimes it is not always the one thing that might be doing it. An example might be having less people fined for driving unroadworthy cars; was it because you have more police, because more people are registering their vehicles or there are other alternative means of transport in the community. It could be a number of different things.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bellenger and Mr Carne. Our time for the hearing has concluded. Have you any concluding remarks you would like to make?

Ms BELLENGER: I am happy to come back at any stage through the process. I think the value for you as a committee is actually hearing from communities that have LDM agreements and perhaps some that are working towards them as well. I urge you to do that. Thank you.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you. We will probably be leaning on you over the next little while for some more information and guidance as to where to travel and where not to travel. Thank you for attending our committee hearing today.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE

Mr CHAIR: The Public Accounts Committee hearing will resume with the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. On behalf of the committee, I welcome them and everyone else who is tuning into this public hearing into local decision making.

I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Gemma Lake, Acting Chief Executive Officer; and Leanne Liddle, Director Aboriginal Justice Unit from the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. Welcome and thank you for coming. The committee thanks you for taking the time to speak to the committee and we look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing that is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for the use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website.

If, at any time during the committee hearing, you are concerned that you will say something that should not be made public, please let us know. We can then make the committee hearing a closed session, or in-camera session, and take that evidence in private.

Thank for your attending, again. Ms Lake or Ms Liddle, would you like to make an opening statement or some remarks?

Ms LAKE: Mr Chair, I am happy to proceed.

Mr CHAIR: The committee has resolved that we will run a very informal process, where questions will not be asked through the Chair. I open to committee members to start proceedings.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to get a very broad overview from you as to what the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice's involvement is with local decision making. What does it look like for you in your department?

Ms LAKE: Member for Araluen, we feed into and support the work that the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet does on local decision making. The biggest aspect for our department in feeding into and pulling down from that is our work on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which was launched earlier this year.

It has a big component of Aboriginal leadership and that is something we have been working on for a number of years. It has three aims and 13 commitments and there is a big focus on Aboriginal leadership in that space. I will hand over to Leanne to talk a little more about the work we have done in the consultations leading into the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and where we are currently.

Ms LIDDLE: People may be aware that we held 160 consultations for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and while people did not talk about Local Decision Making in that term, they identified that they wanted to control their own destinies and improvement in their communities so that they were functioning. Around that we have wrapped some of the deliverables from the Justice Agreement and the local law and justice groups. That is the framework that we work under to deliver those law and justice groups.

In the first instance, that has been outlined in the Groote Eylandt agreement and we are working through establishing law and justice groups elsewhere. To ensure the structure and processes are followed by all parties, the encouragement to push them under Local Decision Making agreements is what people are wanting. There is a level of security and funding and everyone has to follow the rules and government will end up delivering on what needs to be done.

Mrs LAMBLEY: For my ignorance, can you describe what a law and justice group is?

Ms LIDDLE: It is a body made up of local community members who have carriage of issues that will improve safety in a community. It will range from issues about emergency procedures; when the power gets turned off and there is no access to ATMs; which means no access to cigarettes; which means we are at risk of having violence in the community and more; older people being humbugged for money and cash which they do not have.

Working through those sorts of responses that the community want when systems fail. For example, they may also want agreed practices of when decisions are made in community, how they flow through in the justice space. For us the law and justice goes with community courts. That means Aboriginal people will be able to have a decision in the sentencing process to bring back some of those values that Aboriginal people say are lacking in the system, because they cannot control them at present to make communities safer.

Simple things such as honesty, integrity and respect for Elders. All those things come under the law and justice group and the framework that is built to support that structure is the Agreement and we are building other government arrangements around that to make it stronger.

Mr BOWDEN: You said you had a couple of law and justice groups up and running. How many are we looking at to try and get running across the Territory?

Ms LIDDLE: In the first 12 months we will have at least two and it would be fair to say that we have at least 15-plus requests for law and justice groups. Not all of them are ready to be established in their communities. There is a set criteria that we are using to assess where and who gets those agreements and groups.

Mr MONAGHAN: What does that criteria look like?

Ms LIDDLE: It talks about the people in the law and justice group themselves. They have to be credible. The ultimate goal is to have those people in community courts making decisions with the Judge about the right sentence for the defendant. The other criteria is that there has to be a need and there needs to be some—capacity that we drive that through data-informed processes. We need to ensure that the committee has the capacity to drive what needs to be delivered. It is not saying that the more difficult, dysfunctional communities will not get a law and justice Group but there will have to be key improvements in some of the areas for us to make sure that the money we are investing in this space is spent right.

Ms LAKE: If I could add to what Leanne said. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement has obviously just been launched and we are fairly early in the piece around the development and establishment of the law and justice groups. There is an acknowledgement there could be slightly different models for different communities. We are putting together now our governance committee for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. There is still some work to do in that space but the demand is definitely there.

Mr YAN: Following up on what Bridgette Bellenger was speaking about this morning, there has been some difficulty getting engagement and delivery specific for Central Australia. For Robyn and I that is our patch. Have you found any issues about being able to deliver and work with some of the communities there to set up law and justice groups?

Ms LIDDLE: No, nothing our end. In fact, they are ready to press go. The problem is addressing that need and the expectations of what can be delivered, given some of the makeup of the communities. If they have not identified, fixed or solved some of the issued on native title issues, it has been difficult to try to work with one group that represents all those native title holders. That is not really the case in Central Australia.

We have not had any issues whatsoever. In fact, when we have consulted, people were giving us names there and then, wanting to be on this committee. There is an appetite there. It is just people understanding the structures and processes and the ability for government to respond.

Mr YAN: I have a bit of insight into corrections and how the justice system works in communities. Is there a thought to imbed or increase the capacity of community corrections within those communities with law and justice groups so that

there is that synergy between what that group is doing and, of course, the legal side within justice and corrections to amalgamate some of those decisions from those groups?

Ms LAKE: Good question, Member for Namatjira. For us, that will be part of the process of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the law and justice groups. We have Community Corrections staff in a number of communities. The work we will do through the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is looking at sentencing, community courts and other bits and pieces.

We obviously have corrections in that loop and Leanne and I meet with them regularly to talk about those things. There is always opportunity there for that, especially with them being part of the department. There is nothing active in that space right now other than our engagement with Correctional Services in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and looking at some of the work we will be doing. Absolutely, looking at community courts and sentencing—which is part of what the Aboriginal Justice Agreement will do—the community corrections and the corrections space is a key part of that process. We will be working really closely with the commissioner.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is probably getting down into weeds a little, but it goes to the heart of the credibility of agreements and things. Who determines what a credible person is? Do you have a set criteria? Does the community determine who it is? Is it government? Is it negotiated?

Ms LIDDLE: The way it was worked for the Groote Eylandt law and justice group—and the criteria was developed shortly thereafter—credible people means people without a significant criminal history; those who are respected by the community and are able to lead, but are also representatives of the community. We ensure a gender balance and that if there are three or four major family groups, at least one representative is in that mix to represent that group.

People may have criminal histories, but if it is a relevant criminal history, then that is when a decision will be made whether you are suitable or not. They are not ...

Mr MONAGHAN: Those names are put forward to?

Ms LIDDLE: To us.

Mr MONAGHAN: To the department?

Ms LIDDLE: Correct.

Mr MONAGHAN: Okay. The department ultimately ticks off who ...

Ms LIDDLE: We will not ultimately tick off. People who sit on these groups may have a criminal history, but it may be that they stole a cow 20 years ago, did something when they were a teenager, but they have not reoffended since or have undertaken a domestic and family violence course and addressed their behaviours. That is the only way we will get credibility when we move into the other areas that will fall in community courts and community sentencing.

Mr MONAGHAN: What role does the traditional lawmakers within the family system play in that?

Ms LIDDLE: They are technically selecting and authorising the selection of the person to us in the group. We talk a lot about cultural authority rather than cultural law when we talked in our consultations.

Mr YAN: Apart from the work that has been done with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which has been a huge body of work—I know a bit about it and have been involved with it—is there any other work being undertaken within Attorney-General, Corrections or some of the other agencies that sit within AGD to provide assistance to the local decision making framework in communities across the Territory?

Ms LAKE: It is mainly the work under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We have some regional staff who sit on regional co-ord committees. That feeds into that space. I could not tell you off the top of my head who they are and which committees they are on. Mandy from Nhulunbuy is on one of them. There is that element as well. That is the primary. Some of our legal advice about local decision making agreements and things would generally be the only other involvement we have in that space. It is mostly in the AJA space.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Crime is front and centre to life in most Aboriginal communities and Alice Springs in Central Australia. Reading between the lines, are the law and justice groups a solution to addressing crime? Is that why this has become such a feature?

Ms LIDDLE: Some of the decisions these law and justice groups have already put on the table that they want to tackle is the issue of drug and alcohol use in communities. They want to have a voice at the table so they can address where the inadequacies are to be able to deal with the problems they deal with day in and day out. They are issues such as the lack of parenting programs, resilience and impulse control programs. To my knowledge, it seems we can find no one who is delivering on that.

Finding and delivering new programs that tackle that—that are relevant today that may not have been so relevant five years ago—so this is where the law and justice groups are giving that local information and saying, ‘We have a problem with this type of person in our community. These are the issues we want to tackle. We will bring it to the table here and bring it to the attention of government.’

The law and justice groups are not a fixed group of people. It may be, depending on the topic, that you have different people come to the table, but they are the relevant people for that particular topic—on child protection issues, drug and alcohol, crime or how they want to tackle permits and visitors to communities. All those issues are what law and justice groups would ultimately end up tackling.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In practice, those groups would be potentially dealing with a lot of different agencies across government and non-government. They would have to be fairly well resourced. How are you intending to resource them?

Ms LIDDLE: Under the justice Agreement we have enough money for the first 12 months to deliver on those justice groups we are looking at establishing now. In regard to the involvement of all the other agencies, a governing committee that sits across the law and justice groups under the AJA structure includes the 10 CEOs from relevant government agencies, and there are about 10 to 15 other NGOs, peak bodies and more that will sit together and agree to local action plans that are developed from that community of what they would like fixed within the first 12 months or so.

Mrs LAMBLEY: With local decision making, this could be a part of the package, but it could be quite separate from local decision making too. Is that right? Or is it a part of the LDM?

Ms LIDDLE: Yes. It has to come under the umbrella and it is important it comes under that framework otherwise there is the ability to be isolated or fractured from government systems and decisions.

Mr MONAGHAN: My assumption is the Aboriginal Justice Agreements, the umbrella, and the LDM sits within that and a component is the individual agreements such as the Groote Eylandt Implementation Plan which is up and running. Is that correct?

Ms LAKE: In a sense. I would say probably in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, we have the Aboriginal Affairs Strategy – Everyone Together and the Local Decision Making, which is a whole-of-government policy. I think the AJA feeds from and back up into those.

Mr MONAGHAN: Of the group one, could you unpack that and give us some insight—I’m assuming that is the one that is probably the most advanced of them all—what its plans are and the progress is like in that space and some of the challenges that may have come out of that?

Ms LIDDLE: Under the Groote Eylandt model, money has been put in that space by the local land council to build an alternative to custody for Aboriginal males aged 15 to 25 years. They have been identified from the data we put forward when we did the consultation for the (inaudible) cohort that this was the most at-risk cohort on the island. We have to build that structure, which will be operational by July next year. The local agreements for the building of those structures is actually being done on Groote Eylandt.

The other sector to that in the justice space under the agreement is the law and justice group. The community is getting assistance from Aboriginal NGO to assist them but we still sit on the committee and drive that to make sure it is moving at a pace, and with government content, as we move along.

Mr MONAGHAN: That is funded by the ALC the incarceration complex? That would stop their community being sent to the Berrimah prison, away from home, and they would fulfil their requirements under the corrections at that location. Is that correct?

Ms LIDDLE: The government is responsible for the operational component and the Anindilyakwa Land Council have provided substantial amounts of money from their royalty fund to pay for the capital. The criteria for entry is something that would come under the law and justice group arrangement. It would not be a serious offending, it would be low-level early stages of offending or those at risk.

Mr YAN: I suppose the longer term aspirational stuff from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is less offending, less people in our correctional centres, less people entering the larger justice systems. As part of the LDM and ongoing, have we any framework around monitoring and measuring KPIs and those sorts of things for us to come back in 12 months, two years, four years and actually show the difference that it has made?

Ms LIDDLE: We have a rather robust evaluation and monitoring of the justice Agreement, which would obviously include these law and justice groups. The monitoring of the LDM, I am unable to answer that question because I do not know how that operates. Certainly, the monitoring evaluation under the Agreement is strong, robust and inclusive. We intend to do that within the first 12 months.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Would the people on the law and justice groups be paid or are they voluntary? How many are we talking about in each group?

Ms LIDDLE: When we did the consults, people said we wanted to be paid for our services, 'we are offering you professional advice and we would like to be respected and acknowledged for that'. The intention to pay people. We are yet to work out the process, whether it is sitting or casual fees. Each model will differ according to what the location may be. The expectation is that people will be paid which means it narrows down people who can be on the law justice groups in many ways, so they are able to be available when meetings are held.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Would they have a secretariat—administrative support?

Ms LIDDLE: That is us.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many on each group, approximately? Three plus?

Ms LIDDLE: We are leaving that up to the community. It might be that they want to talk about emergency response—the power going out or when nurses are evacuated. There is a group positioned for that type of response. That may mean two or three people; it might mean 10 or 15 people. Instead of government going out and picking who they think is best to be around the table, the community makes that decision. Then they provide us with who they believe can provide us with that information. It bypasses all those language, conflict and cultural issues that the community has to own, and not government.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You said there will be two of these groups set up within the first 12 months, and you have had a further 15 requests?

Ms LIDDLE: At least.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You could end up with dozens of these across the Northern Territory, which is quite a bureaucracy you are setting up, is it not?

Ms LIDDLE: There goes the challenge of making sure that there is no duplication of government services in that space. For example, if there is a good community school council working well and people are happy with that response, we would not address educational issues in the law and justice space. We would take that back to the committee and say, 'This is the process you need to engage in if you want to talk about education issues in your community.'

Potentially, yes, but it is really about where there is a need and where we can make the most impact with people who are ready to be on the journey.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Would their roles extend to doing mediation work, like that grassroots working with people to prevent things from escalating?

Ms LIDDLE: That would also be up to the relevant community and what their needs are. They may choose that they have a mediator they use all the time, that they want used when there is a conflict in the community, or they may decide that this is the process they want followed when there is conflict, and 'We need that supported by your structures.'

Mrs LAMBLEY: A final question from me; we are running out of time. Given that the potential for this to become quite a huge operation, how much has the government budgeted over the forward estimates to pay for these law and justice groups?

Ms LAKE: We have funding for the first 12 months, which is \$4.52m. That is for us to tackle certain actions in the first 12 months, including the two law and justice groups. Obviously, we will have a look at how we do with all those things, then we will go from there. We also have a philanthropic organisation that is interested in providing money. That is in the public domain. That is the Paul Ramsey Foundation. They have committed \$2m. They have indicated support. We are still working through the details of that, but law and justice groups is an element in their funding contribution.

Mrs LAMBLEY: From your scoping, surely you would be looking at four or five times what you are already spending if these things are as popular as you are predicting?

Ms LAKE: That will be part of this 12 months to see how it goes and how the secretariat support goes and how successful it is. Hopefully, there is a bit of that justice reinvestment in that sense.

Ms LIDDLE: Just because they are popular and people want them does not necessarily mean they will get one or they need one. We are hoping that the ones we are establishing early becomes a template for others to say, 'We would like to have a conversation with you about establishing a law and justice group in this community.' Why? All that background work needs to be done because they are the reasons why the law and justice groups will work. The ones which have not shown progress in the areas that we need progress to be seen will not be as productive and will not be able to meet our skillset and budget. All those considerations come into play.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you.

Mr CHAIR: We had only allocated 30 minutes, which may be not enough. Are there any other comments or remarks which you would like to make?

The one question I had was on cross-agency work. We heard from DCCM how it is all coming across and I think we heard there are hundreds of staff, from time-to-time, who work on this; it is a complicated complex piece of work. Is there any way that you are managing and measuring it? Are there top line figures that are fed into it?

Ms LAKE: In what sense?

Mr CHAIR: Mr Carne was talking a matrix of data and I can think of a few things off the top of my head. Is there any key performance indicators or top line numbers that are across agency or specific to your agency for example incarceration rates?

Ms LAKE: We have daily incarceration rates, as Mr Yan would know. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement is built on a huge amount of data and is evidenced-based. It is a seven-year agreement and we acknowledge that we are probably not going to reduce incarceration rates in 12 months. If we did, that would be great, but it is a longer term strategy. We certainly have a great data team in the department and we have a lot of data we can benchmark from, including incarceration and different offence rates. We have a fair bit we can benchmark from and the pathways to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement document sets out a lot of the evidence and the data base for the agreement itself and for the strategies. I am not sure if that answers your question but I hope it helps?

Mr CHAIR: The more we look into this, the more complicated it becomes.

Ms LAKE: Data is critical to these kinds of things. It informs where you start, informs you along the way and where you end. Part of that evaluation will be looking at the data.

Ms LIDDLE: We recognised, when we did the justice Agreement, that if we just looked at raw data or the data in the justice space independently of not doing the consultations, we would have ended up with a completely different Agreement. Being informed by that data with the community consultations and recognising what the capacity is of that community and how long it will take for them to get up to speed to react and perform at their best in this local decision making framework, is important.

The social economic areas and the capacity for people to say: 'what does a safe community look like for you', for some communities it does not necessarily mean a new police station or more police. It will mean that when I pick up the phone and I call the police, they will be here and respond to my Triple Zero phone call. All those areas of input have to line up to measure success on a lot of those outcomes.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you Ms Lake and Ms Liddle for taking the time today, from your busy schedule, to present to the committee. Next, we have the Department of Health.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee I welcome you to this public hearing. I welcome to the table Dr Frank Daly, Chief Executive; and Rus Nasir, Acting Director, Aboriginal Health Policy. Thank you for coming to speak with us today.

This is a formal hearing of the committee, therefore parliamentary privilege applies and the obligation not to mislead the committee applies. As this is a public hearing it is being webcast and a transcript may be put on the committee's website. At any time, if you think something you will say may not be made public, we can go into a closed session and go in-camera. Please let us know if you do not want anything you say made public. That is not a problem.

Can you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing today? Would like to make some opening remarks or a statement, Dr Daly?

Dr DALY: Good afternoon. My name is Dr Frank Daly and I am the CEO of NT Health.

Mr NASIR: Rus Nasir, Acting Director, Aboriginal Health Policy in the department.

Dr DALY: Mr Chair, if I may, I have a prepared opening statement which I can read to you. Before we begin, I acknowledge, of course, the traditional owners of the land we stand on today, the Larrakia people. I pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging.

The Department of Health welcomes the opportunity to provide information to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry today on local decision making, particularly as it relates to the transition of health services to Aboriginal community control. NT Health supports local decision making and the principles that underpin it, and all Aboriginal Territorians in their community-control aspirations.

NT Health is a mature organisation when it comes to transitioning health services to Aboriginal community control, with approximately half the remote community health centres in the Northern Territory being now managed by Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations that we refer to as ACCHOs.

NT Health is a member partner of the NT Aboriginal Health Forum, along with the Australian Government Department of Health, the NT primary health network, Aboriginal Medical Service Alliances—AMSANT—and the Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency—NIAA.

The NT Aboriginal Health Forum, Pathways to Community Control Program, supports the agenda to further promote Aboriginal community control in the provision of primary healthcare services and aligns with the local decision making principles.

The program reflects that not all communities will have the same aspiration or current capability to manage the planning, development and delivery of primary health and family services at the same point in time.

Since 2016, under the pathways framework, NT Health has transitioned Milingimbi in 2016 and Ramingining and Gapuwiyak in 2019 to Miwatj health service, and the Maningrida Health Centre to Mala'la health service in 2021. NT Health is currently working with Red Lily Health Board at the moment to transition the West Arnhem Health Centre's Minjilang, Warrawi, Gunbalanya and Jabiru by July 2023. The first transition occurred with Minjilang on 1 July 2021.

Further transitions will also be undertaken with the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, with recently approved Australian Government funding, to transition three centres in Central Australia, being Kaltukatjara, Imanpa and Yulara.

The building of effective and genuine relationships with communities and individuals expressing an interest in community control is absolutely critical in the process. There is a very fine balance between encouraging communities and providing open and honest explanation of the responsibilities and accountability required in delivering primary healthcare services.

In the pathways space, we work mainly with two scenarios—an established Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation or ACCHO and an emerging or new ACCHO. The approach is significantly different according to what we have there.

In addition, the involvement of NT Health in early conversations with communities that express an interest in community-controlled health service is critical for many reasons. The two main ones are: there is an existing process through the NT Aboriginal Forum, Pathways to Community Control, and getting onto that process early is important. Secondly, the delivery of health services is complex and there is an integral component of the transition-readiness is clinical governance, which is very important.

NT health is guided by policy and framework in this regard. Those being the transition of remote primary healthcare services to Aboriginal Community Control policy and the primary healthcare transition to Aboriginal Community Control—Approval Framework. I have a few examples to demonstrate the complexity of health service transitions and the many elements requiring collaboration across NT government and NGO-controlled organisations.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities housing unit works on government employee housing allocated to the Department of Health which is then used for health centre staff. The land tenure unit to secure land council and traditional owners' consent to sublease these health centres in accordance with the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976* section 19 on leases.

The Department of Corporate and Digital Development on the transfer of IT infrastructure, security of the NT government network and leased assets. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics around the ongoing programs in the health centres. For example, repairs, maintenance, minor new works and capital works.

The Department of Attorney-General and Justice and the Solicitor-General for the Northern Territory, whom you have just met, to prepare us legal documents such as subleases, grant funding agreements and the principles of transfer under the *Fair Work Act 2009*.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment in regards to the transfer of NT government employees, under the *Fair Work Act 2009*, transfer of business clause.

Lastly, the Commonwealth Government are responsible for the delivery for primary healthcare, thus providing funding through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme.

I would like to acknowledge that it costs the NT government to transfer NT health services., not only in the management of the transition activities, that are not business as usual for NT Health, but also the budget pressures in providing the ACCHO an adequate budget. For example, it costs more for an emerging ACCHO to deliver the services as they do not have the economies of scale nor the corporate structures to support the same functions that Northern Territory Health provide for the health service.

NT Health has learnt that initial work with an emerging ACCHO must include the development of sustainable and viable corporate structures. NT Health continues to evaluate the Aboriginal Community Control and transition process and we learn from our experience. As I said earlier, we are a member of the NT Aboriginal Forum and a part of its sub-committee headed up by the Australia Government to review the pathways to community-control program.

The first transition of health services to be identified through the Local Decision Making agreement, is the desire of the Anindilyakwa people through the Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making agreement to develop an implementation plan to move towards community-controlled health services. NNT Health is working in partnership with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the Anindilyakwa Land Council and community to develop that plan.

As you can see from my opening statements, the pathways to community control and the transition of health services is complex. However NT Health is committed to Aboriginal community control and the underlying principles of local decision making. Thank you.

Forgive me if I mispronounced a few local names.

Mr CHAIR: This is more of an informal proceeding in our hearing today, with questions and answers, not through the Chair. Considering the length of your opening statement, we may push through past 2 pm if required, if that is alright; to utilise the fact you are here today. I will open it up to the Floor and thank you for your opening statement and attending.

Mr MONAGHAN: How is LDM encapsulated in your strategic priorities going forward; in your policy documents?

Dr DALY: Would you like to speak to Aboriginal Health and I can speak more broadly later?

Mr NASIR: We are in line with the policy of Aboriginal LDM—we run that line. The transition to committee control pathways journey is part of that as well. We are closely aligned. The Chief Minister's Department is pushing that down and we abide by that as well. Essentially, we are doing that work as well.

Mr MONAGHAN: Is it articulated though ...

Mr NASIR: It is articulated in the basic LDM principles as NT Department of Health priority as well.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I thank you for that opening statement. I was the Health minister in 2013-14 and a little of 2015. To hear that statement makes me think that not much has changed, really. There are a few more acronyms and communities added to the list of being targeted for community control. What I am very pleased to hear is that there are three communities from Central Australia on that list, which I do not think were there before—certainly not during my time.

My point is this has been an ongoing process for years—probably well before I came along too. That says a lot about the Northern Territory. I would like to know what is happening with those three communities in community control.

Dr DALY: Those three communities I listed were Kaltukatjara, Imanpa and Yulara. We are in discussions with Congress at the moment. The exact time of transition is yet to be determined, but we are in the initial consultations phase. There is a strong desire of both parties, to my knowledge, that that occurs.

My colleague can speak in much more detail about the fact that it is inherently a long and arduous process and it requires significant consultation. I do not know about these particular organisations yet, but hearing about the transitions that have occurred in others, it is very important to understand—and it speaks to the very heart of the principles of local decision making—the desires of the local people and exactly what they hope to achieve by the transition—our shared understanding and commitment to some of the things they need to be aware of in taking on the corporate and clinical governance, the collaboration of the Commonwealth over funding because they become primary care providers that are funded by the Commonwealth and so forth.

It is not a trivial endeavour. I have learned from my colleague that each community transition is different. We learn from each one. They are different and they proceed at varying paces. I will provide some data to your point of view. We now have 46 ACCHOs providing primary care in communities in the Territory compared to now 53 that are NT Government primary care. We are almost 50/50. Hopefully, in coming years, that balance will shift even further to Aboriginal community control.

Mr MONAGHAN: My assumption is you engage in this conversation with communities. Not every community will want to run its own health centre. They might want the aspirations of yes, we do, but when you unpack it what they actually

want a better say in how programs are run out for health, or better access—whatever it is. They will not necessarily want to take control of it. Is the measure of success the fact that we get to 80% independently controlled, or how do we measure the success of those communities that have said, 'We actually want to get a better service and we want government to do it. This is what we think it looks like.'

Dr DALY: That is a very interesting question. I do not have a personal KPI to get to a certain number of communities transitioned in a certain amount of time.

The overall strategic intent of NT Health is to improve the wellness and wellbeing of all Territorians. That includes people on country in homelands and on communities. Self-determination is a core principle of our strategic intent with healthcare, and people looking after themselves.

You are correct. I will not refer to the community by name, but we are in discussions with another where the key desire at the moment of the community is they have some concerns about aged care in particular. They are very happy with NT Government delivery of health services, but yes, they would like more say in that delivery of health services. Therefore, we are thinking at the moment of developing a health advisory board such that they can feel they have greater oversight and knowledge as to how health services are delivered and greater say in how they are delivered, but do not want to take over control.

Mr YAN: A follow-on from that, Dr Daly. Lawrence Costa can also probably speak to this as well. It has two parts. Yes, ACCHOs are very good and play a great role in the community. I see in communities in my electorate where there are ACCHOs involved there is much greater community involvement and decision making in how health services are provided.

The flip side is—as Mr Monaghan has spoken of—that there are a number of NTG-run health clinics in my electorate and I see a disparity in engagement in the communities. That comes down to local decision making at a grassroots level. You just briefly touched on it. Do you guys have a strategy for local decision making at that lower level in communities so that people in communities can feed back through their health clinics on some of the issues they face or would like addressed? I have seen at local authority meetings where the community has asked the health people and it does not seem to be feeding back. Do you have something in place to address those issues?

Mr NASIR: Of course, as health services are (inaudible) you need some people. I will give you an example of where it has not happened. With the new five regions, we will have those setups in those regional organisations. Health has really changed now. We have half the community-controlled sector of the primary health network on Commonwealth funding and the NTG. It is really about how we work together regionally sometimes, including acute services, hospitals and primary healthcare services, and things such as mental health and so on.

Moving forward, it is a definite priority for the department. We have regional executives in each of the new five regions now. That will be the platform by which we move forward.

Mr CHAIR: Is Purple House an example of that? As I understand it, they wanted it to be under community control and it was not. The primary health outcome was that they did not recommend that.

Mr NASIR: Are you referring to some of the communities Purple House wanted to run?

Mr CHAIR: Yes. Papunya and Haasts Bluff and I think, Mount Liebig.

Mr NASIR: Yes, you are right. We are aware of that. Essentially, there is a criteria for communities to want to transition. It is the place of forum—NT Aboriginal Health forum, not just Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth Government, the PHN and AMSANT—to make that decision who takes on that role and moves forward.

The second part is with your three communities you mentioned, it is important to note that that went to forum. Congress and Purple House put up initial bids, to a certain extent. That was put up and then, basically, Congress put forward too and they won it. They applied to the Commonwealth for funding to transition. That is what has just been approved now. They cannot service those communities until it has been endorsed by NTAHF through the pathways to community control. Then, it has also been signed off and the Commonwealth agreed to pay for the transition.

Mr CHAIR: Was that Kaltukatjara, Imanpa and—what was the third one?

Dr DALY: Yulara.

Mr CHAIR: Yulara.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Does the community get to pick who their provider is? That is interesting that you have described the competition.

Mr NASIR: Of course, like all things, sometimes it is not as clear about how things get up and how they do. Essentially, you have to back the process that has been agreed to by the whole of the Northern Territory health sector. I must say the health sector in the Territory is quite close knit. We work carefully and considerably together.

The process is the process. If an application went to NTAHF and was not decided upon, I am sure we would get some feedback as to why.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is not in line with local decision making, is it—necessarily? That is a bit of an anomaly. It is an interesting scenario you have just painted.

Mr NASIR: As you are aware, all communities will have differences of opinion and it is ‘horses for the courses’. Essentially, some win and some get up through the existing process.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The dissolving of the Central Australia Health Service is counter to the local decision making philosophy; that is my personal opinion. As a community of Central Australia, a lot of people would have liked to retain our local decision making. This is a political decision and I am not expecting you to say too much. How will the new regions, which are basically controlled out of Darwin, reflect the local decision making policy within Health?

Dr DALY: Could I answer that. If I may borrow your phrase ‘controlled through Darwin’, those regional directors report to me. They are part of our NT Health leadership committee. The other three or four members are on the corporate-side and we have our Chief Health Officer.

My interpretation of the model and the way I would like it to work is those regional directors running their regions feel they have the empowerment, authority and the imprimatur to run their health services for the benefit of their local communities.

The act of 2021 states that my job, as assistant manager, is to develop an operational agreement with them but they also have to demonstrate to me that they are taking into account local decision making—they are not the words, but local health input—and the needs of their own communities. At our quarterly review meetings, one of the requirements is that they demonstrate that they are engaging with their community and meeting the needs of the local community.

The other part of balancing that is, I want them to be as autonomous and leading their own health services as much as possible. But there is expertise in some parts of the Territory which does not belong in others. We want to leverage that expertise or know-how across the Territory. An example that might be paradoxical to most peoples’ thinking, is the fact we have probably the best business intelligence and finance analytics capability in Alice Springs. It has been a revelation to be able to ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not surprised by that!

Dr DALY: It has been fabulous to be able to unlock that potential and expertise for the benefit of not just the Top End Health Service but all the others. It is early days, but I hope that is the spirit of the new governance structure that I want to prevail.

Mr MONAGHAN: I have a personal view that economic rationalism does not belong in education or health. I am also a realist and I understand that, as you mentioned before, one of the reasons that the Department of Health can do such a wonderful job across the Territory scale.

When we are under some model handing over to various other providers, they do not necessarily have that scale—the Territory, nationally or globally might have it, depending who it is. Regarding the question of funding models, at one point you are reducing your numbers of impact into various regions because it has been taken over by someone else, therefore you are funding them to a particular level. Because they have no scale, their capacity to deliver needs increased involvement. Are you finding those models are changing to involve land councils and philanthropic contributing, in order to make them sustainable going forward? Is this part of the criteria that you decide on whether people get up or not?

Mr NASIR: It is a good question about the long-term sustainability of the future health services. Essentially, there is a movement towards regionalisation. There will be bigger Miwatj and congresses to a certain extent. It makes sense. It is similar to the ‘hub and spoke’ model of local government, the same things apply. Regarding philanthropic funding, not at this stage. The funding models are essentially from the Commonwealth.

Mr MONAGHAN: Does that surprise you? Aboriginal justice has philanthropic donators.

Mr NASIR: Perhaps people are not asking. It is not my job to talk about whether ACCHO has asked for philanthropic donations. At the end of the day, the funding models are through the Commonwealth and we always maintain that we could be funded differently because of our remoteness. That is the long-term funding deal and the model on how you operate those services will somewhat be dictated by that model.

The community-controlled health organisations have a different model. They want Aboriginal health workers first, local people who know their communities are the first to be seen at those clinics. From a health perspective we encourage that; we want those things to happen to stop people getting to the acute sector. We are aware we have massive health challenges.

To answer your question, that could be something in the future. There are other non-government agencies in the community development sector who receive philanthropic funding and they do their own thing in communities. There is that other play in the sector.

Mr YAN: I will throw you guys a curveball. You spoke about ACCHOs and their recruitment in communities—I see it firsthand at Santa Theresa. Out of the 12 staff, eight live and are from Santa Theresa. As part of the LDM model for NTG Health, are you considering trying to leverage off what some of those ACCHO's doing and employ and recruit more people from local communities. Effectively they are not FIFOs, they are drive in-drive outs. In most of the communities in my electorate, a number of people live there but staff are coming in and coming out from town.

Dr DALY: I have been on a number of communities in the last few weeks and that has come up a number of times. Ideally, people living and working in community would be from community and we would be able to bring people up and train them. We recently had the Aboriginal Health Worker Excellence Awards in Darwin and saw some terrific examples. Unfortunately, it is still relatively uncommon. Sometimes it is very arduous for young Aboriginal people to leave their community and train elsewhere. Efforts are being made in some communities around literacy and engaging with young people, but generally they have to leave home for a period of time. They have to train for a year or two and then return and many find that extremely difficult. We are working with the education sector to see if we can improve opportunities for people to work in health on communities who are local.

Mr YAN: The ACCHOs seem to be able to do it. I am posing the question that they can achieve it better than NTG Health. That is my opinion, it is what I see in the communities I visit. When I was with Corrections, I had a lot to do with Health and we used to try and develop people within that arena to work with Health and to go back on communities to take up roles.

It is interesting and it sits within Local Decision Making; you want people from your communities working in the NTG health sector because there is feedback from what is happening in the communities to the health agency and back up the line. It creates a pathway.

Mr MONAGHAN: This is probably the topical question at this time, COVID-19 regarding the transfer of the health services: what impact is it having on your vaccinations in remote communities?

Dr DALY: Is COVID-19 and vaccination impacting on transition or the other way around?

Mr MONAGHAN: The other way around.

Dr DALY: We have learned over the last few months that vaccination in remote Aboriginal communities requires trust and much more of a social approach than one that is purely a clinical health approach. We have gone from a situation of supply constraint now to one where we have ample supply in most places. In those place where we need to go in and out to provide vaccination, we have had a program. To my knowledge, up to the end of last week, for the NT Government clinics, we have now visited every community twice and are planning third and fourth visits now.

On the ground—and again, this goes to our governance with regional executive directors—we are endeavouring to work with and support, as best we can, all of the ACCHOs around us. Each has a unique set of circumstances, both geographic, logistic and social, with different issues. In some, if you were to term it vaccine hesitancy, we are seeing it because of religious reasons. In others, we are seeing it because of the prevalence of anti-vaccine messages through social media and other ways. In others, we are just seeing an ambivalence or maybe even a complacency that this is not yet something that we need to pay attention to because it is not here yet. We are now taking a community-by-community approach and the ACCHOs are doing exactly the same, trying to tailor our social approach to that vaccine program.

In many ways, Health needs to step back from this a little. Obviously, we are there to provide leadership and information and the vaccine, but this needs to become a movement led by the local community. In many ways, local decision making and self-determination are the key principles behind that. This cannot be a government-led, you-must, we-are-telling-you-what-to-do approach. 'You have to lead this for your own good reasons, we are here to help.'

Mr CHAIR: Sounds a little like me—that the vaccine issue is a harbinger for local decision making on the whole.

Dr DALY: The principles are the same.

Mr CHAIR: It is a nice example for us to follow. If the community is behind it ...

A member interjecting.

Mr CHAIR: There is, unfortunately, a consequence to not being vaccinated. It sounds to me that that is where local decision making can and hopefully end up, with the communities taking hold of it and just using Health, Education, department of Attorney-General, Chief Minister as the facilitators.

Dr DALY: That is right.

Mr CHAIR: How do you collaborate across agencies, because everyone is involved? Is there a mechanism?

Dr DALY: In local decision making or vaccination? Or are we using ones as an example ...

Mr CHAIR: And everything else.

Dr DALY: ... to others.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, LDM, for example.

Dr DALY: In general, government agencies cooperate at a number of levels. We have very frequent coordination meetings between agency CEOs where we talk about shared issues and work at things at a strategic level. Each of the regions, similarly, have regional director meetings that are quite frequent.

As you may have guessed, recently they have been preoccupied with intergovernmental cooperation on vaccination; the obvious players being Territory and Families, Chief Minister and Cabinet, Education and, of course, Health, bringing the ACCHO sector into those conversations as well.

That is the two tiers. Then at local level, within community, where multiple agencies have people, there is that on-the-ground cooperation as well.

You have heard me say it somewhere else, but in the Northern Territory more than anywhere, the social determinates of health really determine the overall wellbeing of Territorians. Health is very much determined by the quality of housing, kids getting to school, the basic human right of good nutrition and kids thriving and being well fed. That takes a shared approach.

Health, in many way traditionally, has been a misnomer for an agency, because we are the agency of disease to so many. In fact, Health cannot do it alone and it needs communities more than anywhere else. Good health and wellbeing outcomes depend on that shared approach to those basic determinants.

Mr CHAIR: Fingers crossed that we can get through this current health crisis and then there is some time freed up which you can devote to other things.

I was at Wadeye recently—I am not sure why. It was good to see I could get a punnet of strawberries in the store, but it was \$4.20. I was there 15 years ago and the number one seller was ice cream in a cone with a can of coke. We have to continue down that path of exactly all those things you said—housing, nutrition, education—and then health. All those things are preventative and then health becomes the diagnosis in treating it.

Are there further questions? Dr Daly, Mr Nasir, thank you very much. We really appreciate you coming in. We will take a short break. Please continue the good work. Let us vaccinate everyone.

Dr DALY: We will. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Mr CHAIR: Welcome everyone. Thank you for attending. This is a formal proceeding of the committee; therefore, parliamentary privilege applies and the obligation not to mislead the committee applies. The public hearing is being webcast, so we are live and streaming. A transcript will be made available to the committee and it may be put on the website.

If, at any time during the hearing, you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, we can go in-camera and make it a private session.

Please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms CHATTERTON: Aderyn Chatterton, Executive Director for Youth Engagement and Partnerships with the Department of Education.

Mr CHAIR: Ms Chatterton, would you like to make an opening statement—some brief remarks.

Ms CHATTERTON: I start by acknowledging the Larrakia people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, live, learn and work. I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

Speaking on behalf of the Department of Education, the implementation of local decision making is a significant priority for us. We recognise the important role that plays in enabling us to support, engage, grow and help all young people in the Northern Territory achieve.

We are particularly proud of the work we are doing with the Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement, which was signed on 30 April 2020. That agreement provides us with a very clear direction about what the priorities are for the Anindilyakwa people. It has a focus on early childhood, education, bilingual, an independent boarding school, the development of Aboriginal educators' bilingual curriculum.

We also implement LDMs through supporting the establishment and operations of local engagement and decision making committees, as well as supporting school representative bodies, including councils, boards and community-led schools. It continues to empower Aboriginal people in the design and deliver of education services relevant to their community.

As we stand, we have 38 lead committees in the Territory and 10 community schools. The department has significantly increased its commitment to LDM since 2018, which is supported by the ongoing investment in a community engagement and local decision making team. They lead the implementation of LDM policy with staff based in Darwin and Alice Springs.

The department recognises, however, that this is everybody's business and we have the strategic priority of improving cultural responsiveness as one of our key strategic priorities for our department.

At the beginning of this school term, we moved to a model where we now have a senior leader, a senior director of school education, in each of the six regions, aligning with all other government agencies. This is really important because it is about the work we do together to enable local solutions driven by local voice.

Mr CHAIR: It is pretty informal in the sense of questions. I throw it open to the committee.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Education links very well to local communities in the Northern Territory, generally speaking, does it not? My understanding is most schools have their councils and local people making decisions about local schools. Education is ahead of the pack to begin with.

Mr YAN: I have to agree.

Mrs LAMBLEY: My beef about education in recent times has been about the very low school attendance rates in remote parts of the Northern Territory, particularly in Central Australia. How can local decision making address that problem?

Ms CHATTERTON: As you would be aware, we have just undertaken significant consultation in the development of our new engagement strategy. We consulted with nearly one thousand people across the Territory in all regions and remote rural communities. A very strong theme, especially in rural and remote, was that the people want a greater voice in influencing and stating what the priorities are in education for their young people and the aspirations they have for them. When we have that active engagement, it positions education to develop programs that will be meaningful, culturally relevant and provide young people with pathways. That is our core business. For us to shape education to be meaningful and relevant, it is about being guided by the local knowledge and cultural understanding.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can education use LDM as a means to try and get school attendance up in those communities, can you flip it around? LDM is a grassroots strategy of developing and empowering communities and something quite extreme needs to be done in remote schools to get kids to attend class. Is there any thought on how to identify communities and suggest they be a part of the community which looks after and directs the school? Instead of bottom-up, take a slightly different approach to LDM. It is obviously only one of a few strategies that could make a difference; getting communities on board in those schools.

Mr MONAGHAN: The Anindilyakwa agreement could be used as it is well progressed. Would you unpack that, in respect to Mrs Lambley's comments, and how it will enable or project that kids will reengage in education. That community had some of the lowest attendance for 30 years. It is probably a good one to start, particularly when you have a good lead-in to an LDM agreement.

Ms CHATTERTON: I have spent one-and-a-half days over there meeting with the local education board to report on our progress in relation to our commitments and implementation in the plan. They gave an inspiring presentation and shared a video on the independent school they are seeking to establish on Bickerton. The core elements of that school will be the 'boarding' element—the young people residing on the island. They also said that it will have a strong

Aboriginal workforce, bilingual education, speaking in language, learning on country and a curriculum that is a blend of cultural knowledge and the Australian curriculum.

As they were presenting that, I said that the majority of those elements can be replicated in our other community schools. How do we learn from the work that is happening there, so that all the schools on Groote benefit? The curriculum map that is being developed is comprehensive and will be in place across all the schools on the island. We have a teacher-trainer coach in place on the island to support local Aboriginal people on their journey to become fully qualified teachers.

The essence of any local decision making is ongoing conversation and feedback. Recently, the board said they are concerned that it is a long journey and we will not have enough immediate people qualified to teach language. We have asked what they are seeking and what we need to do differently to support. That is a beautiful blended model. The land council will employ some local people and we have some of our bilingual experts from the department who will walk alongside them to support them and develop the course.

More local people will feel ownership and connected to that school—positive role models, families feeling a place of belonging. As we are out doing consultations for the engagement strategy, our families and communities are saying that is vital to more of our young people attending school. The Groote one is a great example of the core foundation pieces that the local decision making agreement is pointing us to, saying, 'This is where we need you to start and let us work together on delivering it.'

Mr MONAGHAN: How is it funded?

Ms CHATTERTON: We have provided additional resources centrally to support the implementation—the teacher training position. It is also about how we work as an agency. We already had connected beginnings on island. It is about what we have also put in place.

It is part of my portfolio. As the Executive Director for Engagement, I chair the internal steering committee that monitors how each of our working groups is going with delivering on what is in the agreement. It is not necessarily a heap of extra resources; it is about making this part of everybody's core business.

Mr MONAGHAN: But there must be a funding agreement at the core of that—is there not?—that agrees for people ...

Ms CHATTERTON: Yes, the education implementation plan talks about what we are providing. Originally we provided an additional position that was like a coordinator role, linking between the board and the department. However, as their own board has evolved, they have now appointed an education manager. Again, we met with the land council and said, 'What do you believe this role needs to be at this phase, now that we are in this second phase?' That is when they said, 'We need this really strong bilingual guidance.' There are two additional resources in that respect.

Mr MONAGHAN: What are they funding going forward?

Ms CHATTERTON: It is about—sorry, the land council?

Mr MONAGHAN: The land council, yes. They are a major component to their part of the agreement.

Ms CHATTERTON: An amazing commitment. They have just recently said, 'Yes, we will provide additional funding to support the employment of some additional people who can be trained up in language.' They are also accessing funding and grants for the building of the local boarding school.

Mr MONAGHAN: Okay, so they are building that?

Ms CHATTERTON: Yes, they are actively involved in that, supporting people and recognising the expertise of the traditional owners who are sitting on the board of education as well. It is another form of connecting.

Mr MONAGHAN: As a model they are fairly advanced. What are the learnings for these other communities that Mrs Lambley has been talking about? When you go into those communities, what are the learnings that education is taking away about the LDM approach?

Ms CHATTERTON: I heard Health talking before—definitely the trust and the importance of ongoing genuine conversations on country and being agile. It is a different way of working for a government agency, to say, 'We know we signed this plan here. How are we monitoring implementation but also being open to the changes as they come along? It is important.

In my visit this week I said 'Our plan talks about sharing of data. Can you be a bit more explicit for me? What is it that you are seeking, because data is everywhere? What is the need you want us to respond to so we can give you what you need in a timely manner?' There is importance in the relationships.

Also, it is interesting that the land council gave us feedback on the mechanism of reporting we have set up with our internal governance. They felt that was a very successful way of working. They have encouraged that to be replicated with other agreements. The internal accountability that we have in place is important.

Mr YAN: Stepping back, this links into the conversation we are having now. You spoke about the consultation you have done recently across a number of areas about attendance. Were there any key themes to come out from those communities about how to deal with attendance that will feed back into any local decision making models going forward?

Ms CHATTERTON: There were key themes about how we could increase engagement with schools. They very much align with the work we are seeing in Groote—Aboriginal workforce, the importance of language and culture being taught at school, the authentic opportunities to have a say in the direction that the school is taking, cultural, some people call it competency, our strategic priority talks about improving cultural responsiveness, how are we inducting and supporting people to understand the culture and priorities and the ways of working and learning in the local community in which they are working. That is a theme coming through.

There is also a theme, particularly from practitioners in our school—whether teachers, leaders or assistant teachers—saying we need government agencies to work together for the best interests of our young people. We are releasing the strategy in October and we are looking forward to say how it shapes our way of working.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many local decision making agreements is Education directly involved in?

Ms CHATTERTON: At the moment we have one that is a formalised education implementation plan. We also have about five across the Northern Territory that are emerging. There are people involved more at the local level, through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, who play a key role. Looking at the current pieces in place, it is the Groote one that has the absolute clarity on what they are seeking from education.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you able to tell us which communities are emerging with an LDM on education?

Ms CHATTERTON: I brought a list of where the different schools are at in their journey. The community engagement and local decision making team do some great ‘on the ground’ work, having conversations and talking to community about the continuum; the kind of engagement and involvement they can have in the school. That would go from a LEaD committee, a local engagement and decision making committee. We have school councils, which everyone is familiar with, and we have the ‘ultimate’ which is the community-led schools. At the moment there are 38 LEaD committees in remote and regional. Central

Mrs LAMBLEY: What does LEaD stand for?

Ms CHATTERTON: Local Engagement and Decision Making. There is an agreed plan which is about community saying this is what is important for us in our school; it is about ‘voice’. Our team does six-monthly pulse checks to see how things are going—our team, the Community Engagement and Local Decision Making—on the ground delivering on those priorities.

Another 45 communities are in conversation and are interested in hearing more about it, which is fantastic. The pace which with this occurs is driven by the community.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How have these communities come about being engaged in this process?

Ms CHATTERTON: It has been people being out and about.

Mrs LAMBLEY: From Education?

Ms CHATTERTON: Yes. We are fortunate that many of the team of the community engagement and local decision making people are long-term members of our Department of Education. They talk to me about different iterations of this kind of work which has come about and the different frameworks they draw on. They are out in communities talking about this work, sharing the opportunities and helping people understand, it is something achievable. We absolutely want voice in decision making.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I guess you would not have this figure, but how many of those communities, the 38 and the 45, would be in the bracket that have horrendously low school attendance rates. We have heard today about the low-hanging fruit, the communities that have the governance structures, they are ready to go, they are mobilised and functional. Really, in the Territory, there are so many communities that are not as functional and needing that extra help. How many would you say, percentage-wise?

Ms CHATTERTON: There is definitely a strong alignment. Often we are leading that conversation. We are saying, ‘We are really concerned. We want to be providing something that is more engaging. Can we work together on this?’ This is one way we could tackle it.

There is definitely strong alignment. The Warlpiri schools are now on the pathway. They are wanting to head even further down into community-led schools. We have supported them. We have engaged with the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education to undertake consultation. At the local level, they said, 'Yes, we want someone to walk alongside us and help us develop what this might look like.' We appreciate that is not about just one town or one community, it is a number. There we have a partner going in, and the community has said, 'Yes, that is who we would like to work with on this too.'

Mrs LAMBLEY: Could you give us a rough idea of how many of the 38 and 45 might be amongst those schools that have the very low attendance?

Ms CHATTERTON: How do you define very low?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In the last annual report, I think it was, 50% of remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory had attendance rates below 50%. How many are from remote and very remote areas, to begin with?

Ms CHATTERTON: In Central region, seven of those schools currently have a local engagement and decision making committee.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you able to tell us which ones they are?

Ms CHATTERTON: I can. I have the whole list. Another eight have commenced the conversations and are saying, 'This is something we are open to.'

This might be something you would like me to table?

Mr MONAGHAN: Make it tabled.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, that would be great.

Ms CHATTERTON: I have it for the entire Northern Territory. We obviously get our reports to monitor it. This is at 9 August. Go can go through and have a look.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That will be great. Thank you.

Mr MONAGHAN: You touched on the councils as one of the partners. What about the peak body of councils? How is the relationship there with COGSO on the LDM process? What are they engaging with you?

Ms CHATTERTON: The Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisation is contracted by our department ...

Mr MONAGHAN: Table the document.

Ms CHATTERTON: They are contracted by us who deliver school governance training to our schools and communities. The most recent data in 2020-21, Semester 1, the first half of this year, they were in 20 remote communities delivering training. They have done a beautiful piece of work with Yirrkala, which said, 'We have Yirrkala and Laynhapuy and we want to have a governance structure that is reflective—an overarching body, then both the schools involved as well.'

That is about ensuring all the voices are heard and we are not just assuming a small body can be the voice and advocates for such a wide geographical area. COGSO did a really important piece of work, walking alongside, supporting that ...

Mr MONAGHAN: All those 21 were LDM schools, were they?

Ms CHATTERTON: No. There is a continuum. We have seen recently a couple of urban-based schools which have school councils and they have a great relationship with COGSO. But the schools are saying, 'Our school council is not necessarily reflective of our student body and we want to make sure we have voice that is reflective of all our students.'

They are thinking of having a subcommittee. They would not necessarily have a lead committee, because that is the beginning of the continuum, but a subcommittee. How can we get greater Aboriginal parent voice and involvement in school decision making in our urban centres as well? We have had the conversation with COGSO about the importance of continuing to build on—like the great work they have done supporting Yirrkala—in the grant funding, giving us a proposal on what it would take to increase remote service delivery. The recent ICAC recommendations for how we provide induction to our school councils and governing bodies and provide ongoing training that is culturally responsive and appropriate so people are empowered to have the authority to ask about decisions under the act.

Mr CHAIR: We will prepare a report on local decision making from our committee hearing. Hypothetically, there will be five recommendations. You will get to write one of them. What will you write?

Ms CHATTERTON: What I would write, from an education perspective, is that we have seen great uptake with that data I shared today. We are seeing local stories of increased involvement and us evolving the way we work, as a result of that. The importance of local decision making continuing as a high priority for the government and therefore our department is important. This takes time, and is about trust

One thing we have been asking ourselves is, we might have KPIs but what would a culturally appropriate KPI look like? The is opportunity with how we assess the impact of this work in a way that community voice would say, 'That's what matters to us; that's what success looks like for us', would be a recommendation.

Mr CHAIR: Ms Chatterton, thank you for your time. The committee appreciates you coming in and being forthright and up front with us. If you would like to send that through to us, that would be great.

Ms CHATTERTON: Yes. Thank you.

Mr CHAIR: We are trying to dig a bit deeper and learn a lot more. Thank you.

Ms CHATTERTON: Thank you for the opportunity to showcase the great work that is happening.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Mr CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Davies, to our Public Accounts Committee hearing. On behalf of the committee I would like to welcome you. Thank you for coming.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee in the protection of parliamentary privilege as well as the obligation not to mislead the committee. It is a public hearing and is being telecasted and webcasted and the committee may use the transcript and it may go on the website. If at any time during this hearing you are concerned that you will say something that should not be made public, please let us know. We can go in camera and make it a closed session, then your evidence would be private.

If you could state your name for the record? Mr Davies if you would like to make a brief opening statement or some remarks, the floor is yours.

Mr Davies: My name is Ken Davies. I am the Chief Executive of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. I have a short introduction statement.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities was formed in 2020 and is an agency as diverse as a geographical and social context in which we operate in the Territory. We are charged with the responsibility to deliver services under some of the most important and impactful portfolios of the Northern Territory Government. To do that, we recognise that we need to deliver positive and sustained outcomes for all Territorians and we have to provide services that are safe for, understand and recognise the strength of Aboriginal people and their cultures.

The department has an ambitious vision and we have done that through our Strategic Plan: Connected Communities. Thriving Places. Empowered Territorians. Achieving this vision requires community-led engagement and decision making to best address the needs of Territorians. Our plan embeds our Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework to align and integrate Aboriginal cultural rights, views and experiences with our services, systems and governance.

We celebrate the strength of Aboriginal culture and history and partner with Aboriginal organisations to build relationships with Aboriginal children, families and communities. Our agency is committed to growing our capability to provide culturally responsive services and, from learning from our Aboriginal staff and partner organisations, on how we do this effectively.

Seventeen percent of our department's staff identify as Aboriginal and we are continuously working towards building a workforce that is reflective of the community we serve. As part of this work, we have an Aboriginal Cultural Security Advisory Committee comprising of Aboriginal staff and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer Regional and Community Services. It meets regularly and provides advice from an Aboriginal perspective, on our strategic direction, our policy and programs.

We have appointed the first Aboriginal Elder-in-Residence, Dr Christine Fejo-King, a senior Larrakia elder to deliver strategic cultural policy and program advice across our department. Earlier this year, the department delivered its functional structure as a newly-formed organisation. This is important for us. We used to operate largely from either Darwin or regional centres and it was largely, in a family's context, a fly-in fly-out service.

We now have a regional integrated service delivery model that ensures we deliver service to people where they are most needed and recognises the importance of local employment empowerment through mechanisms such as local decision making.

Over the last five years, Territory Families, Housing and Communities has significantly devolved the number of executive positions and staff working in our regions and remote offices to the regions and remote offices to help us build better relationships with communities and local service providers. We are also providing professional development capacity-building opportunities through forums such as Communities of Practice and Aboriginal Child and Family Centre forums which bring providers and leaders from across the NT together to learn from each other.

In a nutshell, we have moved from, in my view, an agency that knew best to working with people to help them to find the solutions that they need on the ground.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you for your opening statement. It is enlightening to hear about some of your work. This is a more informal hearing than estimates and I will pass on to the committee for questions.

Mr MONAGHAN: Critical to your and your department's work in remote communities and all its programs is the LDMs I suggest. How are you ensuring that those services are maximised through this process and what are some of the examples that you are seeing some evidence, down the track, that LDMs have been rolling out for the last three years. Are you getting some evidence that shows you we are on the right track?

Mr DAVIES: The framework itself has been a real enabler for us, there is no doubt about that. We worked over the last few years, firstly in the families and child protection space in particular, to get to the point where we are actually working on the ground and people are coming to us early and we are going in to help early rather than to intervene in an arbitrary way.

The LDM framework, particularly in the child protection area, has made a huge difference for us. One great example is in the area of children and family centres. We have established three children and family centres. We have one in Tennant Creek with Julalikari, one in Katherine established with Kalano under a very much localised decision making space, and we are in the process of opening one at Kalkarindji at the moment. We are also working at other locations—Wadeye is one.

We are finding that when it comes to families, one of the great thing about the context of children in families, is that people are passionate about them. Aboriginal people know what they want and they are very clear about what that support might look like. Traditionally, sometimes the work has been done in the context of people sitting in Darwin or even Alice Springs knowing best.

We are finding when we get out on the ground—one is a location I will not name where we have employed a local workforce. We have a group called MIKAN which works directly with us—cultural Aboriginal senior people—Yolngu people—who provide us with advice about families that need support. That MIKAN group is made up of men and women—very senior men in East Arnhem.

By seeking advice we have found solutions that have meant the number of children we are having to take away and put in locations either in Nhulunbuy or back into Darwin has fallen dramatically. At the end of the day, those people know where children can be placed to be kept safe and put on a pathway to put them on the right track. That is one example.

I heard the previous speaker talking about the Groote Eylandt Archipelago LDM Agreement. The Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation is embarking on a really ambitious program out there in partnership with government and my agency to deliver housing maintenance, municipal and essential services to a range of houses out there and nine homelands. They do not call them homelands. Their local words are 'satellite communities'. They see them as being linked to the central communities of Alyangula, Milyakburra and Umbakumba.

We have a process in place where, at the end of the day, the funding agreement will enable the Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation to manage the entire social housing footprint on island. We will be there to support and help them, but they will be doing the property management, the tenanting and the tenancy support work for us at a local level, rather than us trying to—as we have been doing—fly in from Nhulunbuy to provide the support on island. That is one example, Deputy Chair.

Mr YAN: In relation to Central Australia, what local decision making agreements do we have in place—in and around Alice Springs, I suppose—to deal with some of the issues we are facing. Are you getting feedback or direction from local people about how to address some of the issues?

Mr DAVIES: Member for Namatjira, the one that jumps out that is actually signed and in train is the one with Tangentyere. At the moment, we are working with Tangentyere, not only to provide early childhood and family support through a distributed children and family centre model, we are also working with them on the property and tenancy management inside those town camps.

From our perspective that agreement has enabled us to target some of the work we want to do with them. Part of that—going to the issue of youth—is that we are in the process of opening up some of the community centres that exist in the town camps; to try and provide an active program for those young people inside those town camps in the evening, rather than the youth coming into the central town area. That is a work in progress. We have still got Brown Street centres that operate as well but, as part of that LDM agreement, some direct work is going on in ensuring that youth programs are properly resourced and can be run inside those town camps in an effort to keep youth fully occupied rather than meeting up in the middle of Alice Springs at night time. That is one example.

In the Barkly region, Julalikari is in the process of working through an LDM agreement. They are not there yet, but that is another organisation that is already running a Child and Family Centre for us. In terms of the capacity, it is interesting the way they have done that. They understood that they would need some support and, as part of that process in establishing the Child and Family Centre, they partnered with Anglicare and Anglicare are working with them on the ground to provide the backroom support, the administrative support, to make sure that centre operates well and provides the support to children and families which they need.

At the local level this takes different iterations but they are two examples of where it has enabled us to go in and have some good on-the-ground discussions under a framework about local decision making, people being in situ, utilising the local capacity to invest wisely.

I want to make the point that LDM, to me, is not an open cheque book. The organisations we are closely working with to ensure that when we do procure services they are delivered properly and where support is needed, we provide it. It is much better than the old contracting methodology, where you just gave out a contract and sat back; you may have checked whether the money was spent appropriately but not necessarily with an eye to outcomes or the way the programs were being delivered.

Mrs LAMBLEY: My understanding of Tangentyere Council is the LDM is primarily with Territory Families around youth, child and family services and housing. How often do you meet with Tangentyere and how does it work?

Mr DAVIES: Regularly. The CEO keeps in touch with me and we had a team down there last week: Jeanette Kerr, deputy CE of Families and Matthew Varley Executive Director and General Manager of youth policy and programs, met directly with them to talk about the work we need to do inside the town camps to get some community-based programs operating in those community centres. That is part of our work. We also have Dorelle Anderson down there who has a close working relationship with Tangentyere.

In terms of how we network, they are running a program for us for young children who are placed into care. It is a really effective program. You are right, there is a lot of work going on with Tangentyere and we interact with them regularly, both formally and informally.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Tangentyere is an interesting example. It is not primarily about a regional area, it is a conglomerate of what is known as fringe camps. In the middle of those camps is the town of Alice Springs. I spoke earlier about this, the fact that people in Alice Springs do not know about what is going on here. Is there any information being disseminated to the broader community of Alice Springs, of which these camps are a part of, to inform them of what is going on?

Mr DAVIES: Member for Araluen, communication, communication, communication is the key. With the kind of footprint our agency has—and minister have spoken to us about this—it is fair to say that we have a lot of work to do to get journalists interested in paying attention to the space, but also to communicate what we are doing successfully as well.

It is a really good point you make. We have the same issues in the remote housing program. I will give you an example. We put in a 30-lot subdivision in Hermannsburg (Ntaria) as an example. At the moment—we have talked to minister Paech about this—it is programmed to have 15 remote homes built on it, some of which are now in situ. When you build a 30-block subdivision, the assumption of people on the ground is that there will be 30 houses. There is a communication issue there. We will put 30 houses there but it will take some time.

Even at the local level when you are on the ground talking about the data and evidence you have, being able to explain clearly what is happening at a localised level is really important for an LDM. Then, sending the positive messages to a community like Alice Springs that you have Tangentyere rolling their sleeves up and having a go with these young people when there is a lot of mobility in and out of the town and there are challenges in managing the town camps ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: There are some things we are hearing about in Alice Springs. I heard about the housing in Hermannsburg. I went out a couple of weeks ago to have a look. It is fantastic. I heard about that and I have heard about the plans of Territory Families to put youth centres on the town camps—great idea; give it a go!

The bits I have not heard about make me curious—the fact that there is a formal local decision making agreement with Tangentyere. We spoke about this earlier, but obviously it is difficult to get the story out there. It is so important, not just for folk like me, but for the Aboriginal people concerned. If there are good things happening, we want to know about it.

Mr DAVIES: There might be something the committee might want to take on board, Member for Araluen. In the context of the work that is happening with Tangentyere—I am being quite upfront here—I recognise that communication is a critical and important issue. We are investing a lot in it, but we still have a lot of work to do.

Part of what we are doing, as an agency—the context here is there is a strong history of schools, health clinics and police stations being in situ in communities. Territory Families and Housing has traditionally run a hub and spoke model. In child protection it was largely a FIFO service. When it came to housing, as an example, we do not have a full-time housing officer at Borroloola. There are major subdivisions happening there.

We have a Territory Families office set up there, but we do not have the full footprint of Sport and Recreation, Housing and Territory Families. We will have that; that is part of the aim. We will establish these offices, which means we can have people on the ground actively talking about what is happening and communicating that to the local people.

That is one of the challenge we have going forward in the commitment to regionalisation. But part of what we are aiming to do is not just regionalisation to Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, but into these remote big communities.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Ken, you are talking constantly about a negative issues, which is crime. We all know the factors that contribute to crime are housing, education, health and youth services—positively and negatively. The fact that we are not hearing about what is happening in those spaces says to me that there is a problem there—which are recognised.

Mr DAVIES: Yes, I recognise that, Member for Araluen. In the agency we talk about buying space. Fostering kinship care is this week, as an example. You have fantastic foster and kinship carers out there. How do you get a journalist to write a story about that and put it in the paper? I was in Adelaide recently and there was a photo of a foster carer and her two children—not the kids who are in care. She runs respite care. She was talking about what she was doing. As well, the numbers and some of the facts about the kids in care were included, plus the noble cause people embark on. Communication is definitely an issue.

I want to raise something with the committee. When I did some work on this I did not know whether you had a chance to look at it or not. I will flag it with you. There is a Productivity Commission report that was done on expenditure on children in the NT in March 2000. It was tabled here. It talks about relational contracting. In the review, it talked about funding and contracting to support capacity building in partnerships with Aboriginal organisations where they are better placed to provide services and improve outcomes for Aboriginal communities. Partnership approaches between Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal service providers—Anglicare, Julalikari—should be supported by funding arrangements that include a clear succession plan and appropriate resourcing and incentives for skills transferring and capacity building over the life of a contract. They were recommending a seven-year contract; we do five years.

It is a salient piece of work in the context of LDM and growing local capacity. It moves away from the classic versus a relational approach to contracting. The classic looked a bit like this—less risk sharing between contracting parties, auditing the service provider and high contract establishment costs. It talked about contract having rigid terms, discrete and short transactions. The new method talked about—and they were done largely from an urban setting context—virtually requires the delivery of a discrete service, competitive marketing among providers and the relationship between contracting parties is not essential for effective service delivery.

The commission is proposing that: in a remote setting purchase requires the delivery of a wide range of services; competitive market does not exist among providers; the relationship between contracting parties is essential for effective delivery—they are saying you cannot just outsource a service and not visit and play a role in it; the contract having flexible terms; there is more risk sharing between contracting parties; auditing the service provider is for strategic planning; and low contract establishment costs from negotiation. That is what they talk about. In the context of the LDM and the work we are doing in communities every day, that is the lens we are trying to bring to it—how we get local people engaged in working with us to deliver the services.

We have \$600m worth of services we contract out of our agency every year. They are not all into Aboriginal remote communities. We estimate there is a workforce of about 4,000 people out there generated with those funds. A lot of them should, and could be, Aboriginal people on the ground. That is part of the remit we have for saying that whilst the LDM space is not a new and magical solution, if we can engage people properly on the ground and get them to buy the package—which they have done on those early childhood and family centres, as an example—you get a hugely productive outcome.

Our advantage is it is about families and children and people buy the package.

Mr MONAGHAN: Ken, thanks for that. It is a timely reminder of the way we operate; it is based on well-researched findings.

Bearing in mind that this is an avenue for media to pick up some of those things we are talking about in this public inquiry, where they can access the material or come and see it firsthand, I want to take us back to what I believe is one of the greatest inhibitors in that space of poverty, which is remote housing. If we fix that, it will have the greatest effects on social outcomes; the data shows that. In the remote housing space in communities—you talked about

Hermannsburg and Groote—what are the other major agreements we have in place, where are they at; are they significant, early or well progressed?

Mr DAVIES: We have a major agreement with ALPA and its building company on Galiwinku. It is a huge contract period over five-years or so, they are committing to have apprenticeships in place and tradies coming out in building, electrical, plumbing in that project. That is a contractual engagement but it is done in the context of the local decision making framework. We are going to Aboriginal business enterprises wherever we can. If they are choosing to partner we are happy about that. Part of the deal is Aboriginal business enterprises, and the agreements we have in place in the remote housing area, we are talking about a 43% employment target. Our agency procurement framework states:

Aboriginal participation—conducting targeted procurement with locally based ABEs in accordance with remote contracting policy and the local decision making framework as a means of building capacity and creating business and employment business opportunities; establishing specific employment targets and designing tender documents and response schedules that reinforces the agency commitment to Aboriginal advancement.

This is without getting misty-eyed about it. It is about doing things in a business-like way but going in with businesses that have a good record of employing Aboriginal people and working with ABEs as well. As a part of that, we have a list of communities, at the back of our agency plan, where we can directly procure on the basis of those particular principles that sit behind an LDM. That is a policy which was specifically written in 2021–22, our agency procurement management plan, that enables us to do the resourcing on those programs you talked about.

It is a massive building program, \$1.1bn. If there is an Achilles' heel—all government members will know this—it is our outstation and homelands area in particular around housing and new housing infrastructure. We do have a program for locations where there are leases and tenure but one area that jumps out at me in which we are investing further, on the back of a direction from Minister Paech, is the Utopia homelands region.

I was there approximately a month ago and we went into houses where no tradesperson had been in for 20 years. It is appalling. We now have a program where we have contracts with Urapunga and local providers. The irony is that three of the houses had been refurbished and repainted and a new kitchen put in with a stainless steel sink, the local people were raking the yards and the contractor was shifting some cars that had been there a long time. Three families from Alice Springs had shifted back to Utopia and their kids were going to school.

If there is an Achilles' heel in this whole housing footprint and framework, we have a public housing model that works well in an urban context. There is more work to do. We have community housing organisations that are stepping up; the Anindilyakwa are well and truly on the front foot on Groote Eylandt but our Achilles' heel across the Territory remains the homelands area and the work required.

Mr YAN: How does LDM in some of those communities feed up around housing? I travel around and see a lot of disparity between communities across the Territory. That is what creates the angst between certain parts of these communities. Do we have a process for local decision making to feed back up to you guys so that informed decisions can be made out into those regions?

Mr DAVIES: Member for Namatjira, we have housing reference groups out there and teams that go out there when we will roll out a Room to Breathe program or a new build program. Designs are put in the community, the design work is done. There is a lot of work that has to go in for essential services—sewerage systems, water systems and power systems, which also, by the way, is an Achilles heel in the homelands and outstations area.

We get a lot of feedback. The challenge we have in taking a program to scale is making sure you are clear, in LDM, in what you are consulting about. If you are consulting to explain, that is a different process to consulting to ask and sometimes about consulting to tell. As an example of being very clear about how you do that, Andrew and I have worked through this bringing in the housing footprint. We have a massive program that we have to roll out. We have to do it to a time schedule that has been set by the Australian Government and the NT Government with an agreed building and infrastructure plan that goes with it.

One of the things we cannot do, Member for Namatjira, is have 47 different designs because every time you redesign a house, you pay an architect another few thousand dollars. Being clear about standardised designs, making sure you have efficiencies in the program, that it is a public housing model and explaining that upfront is really important.

In the LDM space, it is important that you are really clear about what you can and cannot do and be honest about that and the resourcing you have available. Not overcommitting and under delivering is part of the mantra here. That is the way we try to operate. If we say we will do something, we make sure we do it.

Mr YAN: Thanks, Ken, I appreciate that.

Mr CHAIR: With no further questions, that concludes our day today. Thank you, Mr Davies—not just you but you and your team. There were some big numbers there—\$1.1bn building and \$600m in services. I think your total budget might be around \$2bn.

Mr DAVIES: Thank you, Mr Chair. Yes, it is. The issue is that we do the work we do, but cannot do it without partners. The NGOs, Anglicare, Tangentyere and all the stakeholders, such as the safe houses, the women's domestic violence services, the Alice Springs safe house and youth services are all part of the picture. It is a big effort but we get people buying the package because it is about families and children.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you for your time today. We will reconvene the Public Accounts Committee at 10.15 am tomorrow.

The committee suspended.
