



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEES

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2023-2024

Supplementary questions

Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service

Local Government

Hearing: Friday 10 November 2023

Answers due by: Thursday 7 December 2023

Budget Estimates secretariat

Phone (02) 9230 2778

BudgetEstimates@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Local Government

Questions from Dr Amanda Cohn MLC

Land sale by Central Coast Council

1. Land at Thompson Vale Road, Doyalson was acquired by Wyong Council in 2014 for \$7 million and sold by Central Coast Council in July 2022 for \$5.5 million. What is the system for administrators to assess market and land valuation?
2. Are administrators required to consider potential income streams as a result of keeping environmentally significant land assets with the goal of financial sustainability? (For example, by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust)
3. The Minister for the Central Coast and Member for Wyong has committed to examining the decision to sell the environmentally significant site to “ascertain whether correct procedures were followed.” What work has or will be undertaken by the Office of Local Government regarding this?
4. Can sales of land by a council under administration be challenged on the grounds that false or inadequate information informed the sale?

Councillors Code of Conduct

5. Will the Minister’s planned review of the Code of Conduct include reviewing the lack of councillors’ right to appeal?

Private certifiers

6. Will certification powers be returned to local councils?
 - (a) What work is being done by the Minister to tighten regulatory control on private certifiers in the interim?
7. How is the Minister facilitating financial support or resource sharing to ensure councils have full access to Australian Building Standards, regardless of their capacity to pay for access?

Climate change, community safety and asset management

8. How is the Government supporting councils adapting to the warming climate and ensuring community safety?
9. What work is being done to ensure that councils who reconstruct infrastructure assets after natural disasters are not penalised through the Office of Local Government’s financial benchmarking processes?

Local Government

Questions from the Hon Chris Rath MLC (on behalf of the Opposition)

Local Small Commitments Allocation

10. In relation to the Local Small Commitments Allocation and your electorate of Heffron, how many local projects did you commit to fund?
 - (a) Are you able to provide a list of those projects, including how much was allocated to each?
 - (b) Were you personally responsible for the allocation of these projects or were others involved?
11. What was the total amount of taxpayer money that you personally committed would be spent on local projects in your electorate of Heffron?
 - (a) Did you spend the entire amount you were allocated?
 - (b) Who told you the amount you were allocated?
12. What was the process for recording these commitments to ensure that they would be honoured if Labor won Government?
 - (a) Who did you seek approval from when it came to these announcements?
 - (b) Who kept record of these projects?
 - (c) Someone needed to track the commitments being made: who was responsible for that in your electorate?
13. Did you declare a conflict of interest in relation to any of these projects?
 - (a) If so, who did you declare it to and how was the conflict managed?
 - (b) Are you aware of any conflict of interest provisions or rules in relation to this scheme?
 - i. Did you ask about the process or any obligations that you had?

Allocation of Housing and Productivity Contribution Funding to Local Government

14. The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces has indicated that \$1 billion will be allocated to Local Government over 10 years from the Housing and Productivity Contribution, can you advise how much is allocated to Local Government in:
 - (a) FY 2023/24
 - (b) FY 2024/25
 - (c) FY 2025/26
 - (d) FY 2026/27

Development Application Withdrawals by Council

15. Can the Minister please provide how many Development Applications have been withdrawn by council, in each of the following years:
 - (a) FY 2021/22

(b) FY 2022/23

OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS

Agency Invoices

16. How many invoices to suppliers or contactors from your portfolio agency were not paid on time since 28 March 2023, broken down by agency?
17. How many invoices to suppliers or contactors from your portfolio agency were paid over 30 days late on time since 28 March 2023, broken down by agency?
18. How many invoices to suppliers or contactors from your portfolio agency were paid over 60 days late on time since 28 March 2023, broken down by agency?
 - (a) What was the penalty for paying suppliers or contactors late, broken down by agency?

Car/Driver

19. Has your Ministerial car been subject to any traffic or parking fines?
 - (a) If so, please provide details of each fine?
 - (b) Who was driving the car at the time of each incident?
 - (c) Who paid any of the fines?
20. Has your Ministerial Car been pulled over by the police?
 - (a) If so, who was driving the car?

Complaints

21. Has the Minister been the subject of any workplace complaints, including bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment?

Consultants

22. How much did the Department/agencies within your portfolio responsibilities spend in legal costs since 28 March 2023?
 - (a) For what specific purposes or matters was legal advice sought?
23. Have any Department/agencies within your portfolio responsibilities engaged any consultants to provide the following services or advice since 28 March 2023:
 - (a) Social media?
 - i. What were the cost of these services?
 - (b) Photography?
 - i. What were the cost of these services?
 - (c) Videography?
 - i. What were the cost of these services?
 - (d) Acting training?
 - i. What were the cost of these services?

- (e) Ergonomics?
 - i. What were the cost of these services?

24. Since 28 March 2023, how many consultancy contracts have been signed in your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
- (a) What was the individual amount of each contract?
 - (b) What is the purpose of each contract?
 - (c) Who was the contract with?
 - (d) Did the contract go to a competitive tender?

Departmental Credit Cards

25. For each department, statutory agency and/or other body in the Minister's portfolio please report:
- (a) How many credit cards are currently on issue for staff?
 - i. Please provide a break-down of this information by grade.
 - (b) What was the value of the largest reported purchase on a credit card for the last year?
 - (c) What was each largest reported purchase for?
 - (d) What was the largest amount outstanding on a single card at the end of a payment period and what was the card holder's employment grade?
 - (e) How many credit cards have been reported lost or stolen?
 - i. What was the cost to replace them?
 - (f) How many credit card purchases were deemed to be illegitimate or contrary to agency policy?
 - i. What was the total value of those purchases?
 - ii. How many purchases were asked to be repaid on the basis that they were illegitimate or contrary to agency policy and what was the total value thereof?
 - iii. Were all those amounts repaid?
 - iv. If no, how many were not repaid, and what was the total value thereof?
 - (g) What was the largest purchase that was deemed illegitimate or contrary to agency policy and asked to be repaid, and what was the cardholder's employment grade?
 - i. What amount was repaid, in full?
 - ii. What amount was left unpaid?
 - (h) Are any credit cards currently on issue connected to rewards schemes?
 - i. Do staff receive any personal benefit as a result of those reward schemes?
 - (i) Can a copy of the staff credit card policy please be provided?

Department/Agency Staffing

26. How many senior executive service employees were employed by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities on:

- (a) 28 March 2023?
 - (b) 23 October 2023?
27. What is the expenditure on senior executive service employees employed by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities since 28 March 2023?
28. How many individuals were employed as internal legal counsel by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities on:
- (a) 28 March 2023?
 - (b) 23 October 2023?
29. What is the expenditure on internal legal counsel employees employed by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities 28 March 2023?
30. How many redundancies were processed by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities since 28 March 2023?
- (a) Of these redundancies, how many were:
 - i. Voluntary
 - ii. Forced
 - (b) What was the total cost of all redundancies in each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities?
31. Is any former employee from your ministerial office now employed by any Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities?
32. How many staff were dismissed from each Department/agency under your portfolio responsibilities since 28 March 2023?
- (a) Without identifying individuals, what were the reason(s) for each dismissal?
33. What was the total amount each of the Departments/agencies under your portfolio responsibilities spent on stationery since 28 March 2023?
34. How many employees in each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities are working in an 'acting' capacity?
35. What is the average number of days worked from home by employees in each Department/Agency within your portfolio responsibilities?
36. What was the total expenditure since 28 March 2023 by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities on:
- (a) Taxi hire?
 - (b) Ridesharing services?
 - (c) Limousine/private car hire?
 - (d) Hire car rental?

37. Do any senior executive service employees in any of the Departments/agencies under your portfolio responsibilities have a driver that is paid for by the Department/agency?
- (a) If so, what is the number of senior executive service employees that have a driver, and which senior executive service employees have a driver?
 - (b) How much was spent on these drivers since 28 March 2023?
38. Since 28 March 2023, how much has been spent on charter air flights by your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
39. Since 28 March 2023, how much has been spent on domestic flights by your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
- (a) Of these, how many flights were taken in business class?
 - (b) Of these, how many flights were taken in first class?
40. Since 28 March 2023, how much has been spent on overseas flights by your portfolio agencies, broken down by agency?
- (a) Of these, how many flights were taken in business class?
 - (b) Of these, how many flights were taken in first class?

Efficiency Dividends

41. Was an efficiency dividend applied to any Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities in the 2023-24 NSW Budget?
- (a) If so, what was the efficiency dividend applied to each Department/agency?
 - (b) What measures are being considered to achieve this efficiency dividend?

GIPA Applications

42. How many GIPA Applications have been received by your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?
- (a) How many of these Applications have been accepted?
 - (b) How many of these Applications have been rejected?
 - (c) If so, what were the reasons provided?
 - (d) How many of these Applications were re-assigned?
 - (e) How many of these Applications had fees waived/reduced?
 - (f) Please provide in table form the following details of each Application received by your office:
 - i. Date received.
 - ii. Date acknowledged.
 - iii. Date responded.
 - iv. The description provided for the information sought.
43. How many GIPA Applications have been received by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities since 28 March 2023?

- (a) How many of these Applications have been accepted?
- (b) How many of these Applications have been rejected?
 - i.If so, what were the reasons provided?
- (c) How many of these Applications were re-assigned?
- (d) How many of these Applications had fees waived/reduced?
- (e) Please provide in table form the following details of each Application received by your office:
 - i.Date received.
 - ii.Date acknowledged.
 - iii.Date responded.
 - iv.The description provided for the information sought.

Hospitality

- 44. How much has your ministerial office spent on hospitality, including catering and beverages, since 28 March 2023?
- 45. How much have Departments/agencies within your portfolio responsibilities spent on hospitality, including catering and beverages, since 28 March 2023?
- 46. Have you been the recipient of any free hospitality?
 - (a) What was the total value of the hospitality received?
- 47. Have any staff members in your office been the recipient of any free hospitality?
 - (a) What was the total value of the hospitality received?
 - (b) Are these gifts of hospitality declared publicly?
 - (c) Do staff declare their gifts publicly?

Labour Hire Firms

- 48. Have any Departments/agencies within your portfolio responsibilities utilised the services of Labour Hire Firms since 28 March 2023? If yes, please advise in table form:
 - (a) The names of the firms utilised.
 - (b) The total amount paid to each firm engaged.
 - (c) The average tenure period for an employee provided by a labour hire company.
 - (d) The longest tenure for an employee provided by a labour hire company.
 - (e) The duties conducted by employees engaged through a labour hire company.
 - (f) The office locations of employees engaged through a labour hire company.
 - (g) The highest hourly or daily rate paid to an employee provided by a labour hire company.

Media and Public Relations

- 49. How much has your ministerial office spent on advertising or sponsored posts since 28 March 2023 on the following social media platforms:

- (a) Facebook
 - (b) Instagram
 - (c) LinkedIn
 - (d) TikTok
 - (e) YouTube
 - (f) WhatsApp
 - (g) X (formerly known as Twitter)
50. How much has each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities spent on advertising or sponsored posts since 28 March 2023 on the following social media platforms:
- (a) Facebook
 - (b) Instagram
 - (c) LinkedIn
 - (d) TikTok
 - (e) YouTube
 - (f) WhatsApp
 - (g) X (formerly known as Twitter)
51. Have you had media training or public speaking training?
- (a) If yes, who paid for it?
 - (b) If paid by taxpayers, what was the amount paid since 28 March 2023?
52. How many media or public relations advisers are employed for each of your portfolio agencies and what is the total cost to employ these advisers?
53. What is the forecast for the current financial year for the number of media or public relations advisers to be employed in each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities and their total cost?
54. What is the total cost of media monitoring services used by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities?

Merchant fees

55. Please provide a list of all transactions where customers need to pay a merchant fee on credit and/or debit card payments in each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities.
56. Please provide the percentage and/or amount of the merchant fees applied to all credit and/or debit card payments/transactions payments in each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities.
57. What was the total amount paid in merchant fees on credit and/or debit card payments made by each Department/agency within your portfolio responsibilities since 28 March 2023?

Ministerial disclosures

58. Did you make any updates to your Ministerial disclosure on or after 2 August 2023?

(a) If yes, what prompted this update to your disclosure?

Office Administration

59. How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office at the MS6 grade for the following months:

(a) April

(b) May

(c) June

(d) July

(e) August

(f) September

(g) October

60. How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office at the MS5 grade for the following months:

(a) April

(b) May

(c) June

(d) July

(e) August

(f) September

(g) October

61. How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office at the MS4 grade for the following months:

(a) April

(b) May

(c) June

(d) July

(e) August

(f) September

(g) October

62. How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office at the MS3 grade for the following months:

(a) April

- (b) May
 - (c) June
 - (d) July
 - (e) August
 - (f) September
 - (g) October
63. How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office at the MS2 grade for the following months:
- (a) April
 - (b) May
 - (c) June
 - (d) July
 - (e) August
 - (f) September
 - (g) October
64. How many staff members were employed in your ministerial office at the MS1 grade for the following months:
- (a) April
 - (b) May
 - (c) June
 - (d) July
 - (e) August
 - (f) September
 - (g) October
65. What is the average salary for staff members in your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?
66. How many DLOs were seconded to your ministerial office for the following months:
- (a) April
 - (b) May
 - (c) June
 - (d) July
 - (e) August
 - (f) September
 - (g) October
67. How many people are employed in your ministerial office as at 1 October 2023?

68. How many women are employed in your Ministerial office as at 1 October 2023?
69. How many staff employed in your ministerial office identify as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) as at 1 October 2023?
70. How many staff employed in your ministerial office identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as at 1 October 2023?
71. How many staff in your office are employed as media advisers or have responsibility for media/social media/communications?
72. How many staff in your office are employed as policy advisers or have responsibility for policy work?
73. How many staff in your office are employed as 'caucus liaison officers'?
 - (a) What are the responsibilities allocated to 'caucus liaison officers'?
 - (b) Have 'caucus liaison officers' been directed to only work with Government MPs?
 - (c) Do 'caucus liaison officers' contact members of the Australian Labor Party as part of their regular work duties?
74. How many staff members employed in your office under the Members of Parliament Staff Act 2013 have been seconded from a NSW Government Department/agency?
 - (a) Please list each Department/agency staff members have been seconded from.
75. What is your ministerial office budget for 2023-24?
 - (a) How much of this budget is allocated to staff?
76. How many iPhones/Smart Phones are assigned to staff in your ministerial office?
 - (a) For each phone, how much was each bill in 2022-23?
 - (b) How many phones have been lost or replaced due to damage in your office?
 - i. What is the cost of replacing those phones?
77. How many iPads or tablets are assigned to your ministerial office and to whom have they been issued?
 - (a) What was the cost of providing iPads or tablets to your ministerial office in 2022-23?
 - (b) How many iPads or tablets have been replaced due to lost or damage in 2022-23?
 - i. What was the cost of replacing these devices?
78. How many laptops has the Premier's Department or The Cabinet Office assigned to your ministerial office and to whom have they been issued?
 - (a) What was the cost of providing laptops to your ministerial office in 2022-23?
 - (b) How many laptops have been replaced due to lost or damage in 2022-23?
 - i. What was the cost of replacing these devices?

79. Has any artwork been purchased or leased for display in your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?
- (a) What is the cost of this?
80. Have any floral displays or indoor plants been hired or leased for display in your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?
- (a) If so, what was the cost of these items?
81. What was the total amount your office spent on stationery since 28 March 2023?
82. What brand of paper is used in your office?
- (a) Is it recycled paper?
- (b) Is it Australian made paper?
83. What was the total cost of all subscriptions by you and your staff to online news services, newspapers, magazines, journals, and periodicals since 28 March 2023?
- (a) What are these services/newspapers/magazines/journals/periodicals?
84. What was the total value of all gifts purchased for use by you and your office since 28 March 2023?
- (a) What were the gifts purchased?
- i. Who were they gifted to?
85. What non-standard features are fitted to your ministerial vehicle?
- (a) What is the cost of each non-standard feature?
86. What is the total spend for your office since 28 March 2023 for:
- (a) Taxi hire?
- (b) Ridesharing services?
- (c) Hire car rental?
- (d) Limousine/private car hire?
87. Were any planes or helicopters chartered by you or your office and paid for with public money since 28 March 2023?
- (a) If yes, please provide details of the trip including the date of the trip, purpose of the trip, the method of transport and the cost?

Overseas Trips

88. Have you had any overseas trips paid for using public funds since 28 March 2023?
- (a) If yes, did any of your relatives or friends accompany you on these trips?
89. Have you undertaken any official overseas travel that was privately funded since 28 March 2023?
- (a) If yes, what was the nature of these trips?
- (b) Who paid for these trips?

Parliamentary Secretary

90. Does your Parliamentary Secretary have pass access to your ministerial office?
91. Does your Parliamentary Secretary have a desk in your ministerial office?
92. Has your Parliamentary Secretary spoken on any pieces of legislation on your behalf? If so which legislation?
93. What event/meetings has your Parliamentary Secretary attended on your behalf?
 - (a) Please provide in table form the date and the purpose of the event/meeting.
94. How often do you meet with your Parliamentary Secretary?
95. Has your Parliamentary Secretary travelled overseas since 28 March 2023?
 - (a) If so, when, and where?
 - (b) If so, what was the cost of:
 - i. Airfares?
 - ii. Accommodation?
 - iii. Food and beverage?
 - iv. Transportation?
 - v. Entertainment?
96. Has your Parliamentary Secretary travelled domestically since 28 March 2023?
 - (a) If so, when, and where?
 - (b) If so, what was the cost of:
 - i. Airfares?
 - ii. Accommodation?
 - iii. Food and beverage?
 - iv. Transportation?
 - v. Entertainment?
97. Has your Parliamentary Secretary received training?
 - (a) If so, was it speech, voice, or media training?
 - i. If yes, who provided this training, on what date and at what cost?

Probity Auditor

98. Has your office or department used a Probity Auditor or Probity Advisors, or similar, since 28 March 2023?
 - (a) If so please list the company and/or individual, the project, the engagement dates, and their total remuneration in tabular format.

Qantas

99. Are you a Member of the Qantas Chairmans Club?
 - (a) Have you ever previously been a member? When did you cease to be a member?

- (b) When did you initially become a member?
- (c) When was this declared on the Ministerial gifts register?

Training

- 100. Have you received any training since becoming a Minister?
 - (a) If yes, please provide the details of what the training was.
- 101. Have you received any speech, vocal or performance training?
 - (a) If so, what was the cost?
 - (b) Was this cost covered by the taxpayer?

Website Usage

- 102. What were the top 20 most utilised (by data sent and received) unique domain names accessed by your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?
- 103. What were the top 20 most accessed (by number of times accessed) unique domain names accessed by your ministerial office since 28 March 2023?

Local Government

Questions from Ms Abigail Boyd MLC

Companion animals register

104. How many pets are registered on the companion animals register?
105. We were advised that a pilot for an updated pet registry was taking place last year - what is its status?
106. Are owners contacted to provide annual updates of their pets registration details at no cost?
 - (a) Why not?
 - (b) How many registration detail updates were recorded last financial year?
107. What steps are you taking to improve the registration rates of companion animals?
108. Will you consider a moratorium on penalties for registration and desexing fees after 6 months?
109. Will you consider an amnesty on registration fees entirely?

Desexing

110. What steps are you taking to increase rates of desexing?

Euthanasia rates

111. Can you please advise of the euthanasia rates for each council pound or rehoming facility for each financial year from 2016/17 until 2022/23?
112. Following the review into Rehoming Practices, has there been consideration to the recording of methods of euthanasia at council pounds?
 - (a) Has there been any data collected for this?
113. Can the Minister confirm whether any NSW council pounds are still shooting impounded animals as a method of euthanasia?

Deaths in pounds

114. How many animals were impounded for:
 - (a) FY 2021-22?
 - (b) FY 2022-23?
115. How many animals died of any cause while in the care of a council pound for:
 - (a) FY 2021-22?
 - (b) FY 2022-23?
116. How many animals died as a result of illness or injury for:
 - (c) FY 2021-22?
 - (d) FY 2022-23?

117. How many animals who died as a result of an illness or injury were attended to by a vet before their death for:

(e) FY 2021-22?

(f) FY 2022-23?

Budget

118. Can you please advise why AWL and RSPCA were told not to make submissions to the September Budget?

119. Can you please advise why no funding was allocated to rehoming organisations in the September Budget?

120. Through various grant opportunities NSW OLG makes available public money to NSW councils to improve welfare outcomes in their pounds.

(a) What is the total funding allocation to council pounds under these grants for:

i. FY 2021-2022?

ii. FY 2022-2023?

121. Can you please advise why NSW has not followed the Victorian model to provide recurrent funding for rescue and welfare organisations, and why it is continuing an ad-hoc funding approach?

(b) Are there plans for funding to be dedicated to the welfare of non companion animals, including farm animal rescue groups, e.g farm animals which are sometimes surrendered to pound facilities?

122. The Australian Institute of Local Government Rangers state that “OLG grants are rarely offered and are generally only available for targeted initiatives or other general activities that promote responsible pet ownership and is not available for the funding of pounds.” Are there any current grant arrangements for pounds or animal welfare initiatives?

Greyhounds

123. Do you find it alarming that councils across NSW continue to receive abandoned unmicrochipped greyhounds, despite the increasing funding allocated to GAP each year?

124. Have you received any complaints or correspondence by councils regarding care for abandoned greyhounds in council pounds?

125. How many unmicrochipped greyhounds have been recorded in NSW Council pounds for:

(a) FY 2021-2022?

(b) FY 2022-2023?

126. How many greyhounds have been impounded as seized or surrendered in:

(c) FY 2021-2022?

(d) FY 2022-2023?

Eurobodalla shire council

127. Can you provide an update for the investigation by Eurobodalla Shire Council into breaches of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act at the Moruya New Years Day Rodeo event?

(a) Has your office been briefed on this?

Compliance of pounds

128. Please provide information on how many NSW council pounds have been inspected for standards of compliance or non-compliance, including specifically which pounds were inspected, the dates of inspections, what if any infringements were actioned, how many, the nature of these infringements, and whether any animal cruelty matters were involved:

(a) by RSPCA NSW during the 2021-2022 financial year;

(b) by AWL NSW during the 2021-2022 financial year;

(c) by RSPCA NSW during the 2022-2023 financial year; and

(d) by AWL NSW during the 2022-2023 financial year.

129. Since the passing of the Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Bill in February 2022, can the Minister confirm what audits have been undertaken or will be undertaken to ensure council pounds are following the legislation?