



ACT GOVERNMENT

RESPONSE TO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SOCIAL
EQUITY**

***"REPORT NUMBER 1 - PRIORITIES FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE
2002-2003 ACT BUDGET"***

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

"REPORT NUMBER 1 -INQUIRY INTO 2002-2003 BUDGET"

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

"REPORT NUMBER 1 - BUDGET CONSULTATION 2002-2003"

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS

***"REPORT NUMBER 1 - PRIORITY ISSUES FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN
LEGAL AFFAIRS WITHIN THE 2002-2003 BUDGET"***

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

***"REPORT NUMBER 2 - SERVICE DELIVERY - 2002-03 BUDGET
CONSULTATION PROCESS"***

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

***"REPORT NUMBER 1 - SERVICE DELIVERY 2002-2003 BUDGET
CONSULTATION PROCESS"***

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**AUTHORISED BY
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Introduction

On 13 December 2001, Mr Ted Quinlan MLA, the Treasurer, invited all issue-related Standing Committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly to participate in the process of identifying service delivery and service prioritisation outcomes for the 2002-2003 ACT Budget, these committees included:

- Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity
- Standing Committee on Education
- Standing Committee on Health
- Standing Committee on Legal Affairs
- Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
- Standing Committee on Public Accounts

The Treasurer emphasised that it is the role of government to make decisions on the final content of the Budget, however, he recognised that Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly may wish to contribute to such a process. This invitation was formalised through correspondence to the Standing Committees, on 20 December 2001. All of the Standing Committees accepted the Treasurer's invitation and each conducted a formal Inquiry in aspects of the budget development process during the first three months of 2002.

During the course of their inquiries, the Standing Committees received eighty-eight submissions from community groups and individuals. During the conduct of public hearings before the various Standing Committees, there were forty-one appearances by individuals and groups. The reports of all the Standing Committee inquiries into priorities for the 2002-03 ACT Budget were tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 9 April 2002.

Of the six committees, only the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity made substantive content-related recommendations, whilst the other committees made recommendations regarding the process and endorsed the issues raised in community submissions, for government consideration. The Standing Committees on Health and Public Accounts recommended or concluded that the Government analyse aspects of community and unmet need. The Standing Committee on Education recommended the Government investigate perceptions regarding education funding. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts chose to make no recommendations at all, instead making two conclusions.

During the same period, the ACT Government conducted its own consultation process, which was initiated by a letter issued by the Treasurer, Mr Ted Quinlan MLA, inviting community and business groups to input into the development of priorities for the 2002-03 ACT Budget. Thirty-three submissions were received by the ACT Government from a range of community, business, sports, union and environmental groups, who made over \$53m in additional funding requests.

Some of the groups addressed their comments directly to the Government, while others provided a copy of the submission they had previously provided to the Inquiries being conducted by the Standing Committees of the Assembly. Subsequent to the release of the Budget Consultation Paper, one further submission was received, directly addressing the issues contained therein.

Overview

The six Standing Committees made a total of eleven recommendations and two conclusions in the reports of their Inquiries.

The reports of four Standing Committee inquiries into the budget included a recommendation which asked the government to consider the issues raised by community organisations through the committees when developing the 2002-03 ACT Budget. The Government has undertaken this task, across all of the Standing Committee reports and in relation to those submissions received through its own consultation process.

As part of the budget development process, all ACT Government departments have been involved in analysing and providing advice on the submissions received from the community. This work included a consideration of both funding and policy matters. An examination of the themes evident in all the community submissions is included in Budget Paper No.3, along with the Government's response to those themes.

The Government is also aware that a number of the Standing Committees expressed some level of concern regarding the timing of the provision of the 2002-03 Budget Consultation Paper. While the government does not believe that it was essential for the Standing Committees to have the Paper in order to conduct their Inquiries, it does recognise that it may have impacted on the work of some committees. The Paper was delayed as the Government believed it was critical for it to contain updated economic and government financial data. As such, the Department of Treasury was reliant on other timelines, for example the Commission of Audit.

The Government intends to refine the budget consultation process in time for the 2003-04 ACT Budget, with a view to ensuring that information is available at an earlier stage in the process.

The Government echoes the sentiments of thanks expressed by the Standing Committees to those community groups who participated in the budget consultation process.

In particular, the Government would like to acknowledge those community peak bodies who invested substantial effort in developing comprehensive submissions which addressed a broad range of issues impacting on the Canberra community. The Government is particularly appreciative of the contributions of the few community groups who balanced their requests for additional funding with suggestions regarding areas for revenue growth.

Response to Specific Recommendations and Conclusions of the Standing Committees

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SOCIAL EQUITY

The Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity announced its intention to participate in the budget development process, through a statement by its Chair in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 21 February 2002. The Committee called for public submissions and conducted public hearings. Twenty-six submissions were received and sixteen organisations appeared before the Committee during its public hearings.

The Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity made four formal recommendations in the Report of its Inquiry, and this Government Response addresses each of those recommendations.

Committee Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that in finalising the 2002-2003 ACT Budget, the Government ensure that funds are allocated for the implementation of recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force.

Government Response

Supported. The Affordable Housing Taskforce is examining methods of increasing housing affordability on a cross portfolio and cross agency basis, and will be recommending to government a range of options to address the need for affordable housing.

Secretariat support for the Taskforce together with funding for commitments and associated activities are provided from within the existing Housing Policy and Planning budget within the Department of Urban Services.

Committee Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the budget papers identify separate allocations for community housing and ACT Housing.

Government Response

The specific identification of community housing funding in the budget is a sensible proposal and may be implemented in the 2002-03 Budget where appropriate.

Committee Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Government consider the establishment of an independent housing information service when determining priorities for the 2002-2003 Budget.

Government Response

Noted. The Applicant Services Centre currently provides a gateway to housing assistance to ACT Housing. A Housing Manager Specialist at the Centre works with applicants to refer them to a range of support services, assist them with their applications and inform them of the full range of housing services.

However, it is recognised that there may be gaps in service. Accordingly the Government is currently considering models for the establishment of an emergency accommodation referral centre. This service would provide a 24-hour telephone referral service to emergency accommodation in the ACT.

Data collection from the Affordable Housing Taskforce (AHTF) on the range of housing needs, will be used to inform future housing policy development. The AHTF is to report to the Assembly in October 2002.

The issue of a central access point for housing providers including community housing, is being considered as part of the consultation process on the Future Directions of Community Housing.

Committee Recommendation 4a

The committee recommends that the Government:

- *ensure the 2002-2003 Budget funds the community sector adequately for indirect costs; and*

Government Response

Noted. The 2002-03 Budget incorporates funding for community sector indirect costs. Funding to organisations currently covers indirect costs, including matters of insurance costs, compliance requirements, police checks and OH&S.

Committee Recommendation 4b

The committee recommends that the Government:

- *fund the development and implementation of a plan for community services.*

Government Response

Noted. The Standing Committee's Report suggests that this recommendation relates to the "development and redevelopment of accommodation for community services across the ACT".

A Community Facilities Needs Assessment Study is examining the use and supply of community facility land in Central Canberra, Belconnen and Gungahlin (other areas of Canberra will be studied in 2003). The purpose of this study is to assess current and future requirements for the provision of community facility land in the ACT, inform future analysis and assessment of development proposals and maximise the use of existing community facilities. The work will also provide information for government agencies to use in the future planning of community facilities and service provision.

This Community Facilities Needs Assessment Study will be one of the key inputs taken into account in the analysis of unmet need and the development of the Social Plan.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

The Standing Committee on Education announced its intention to participate in the budget development process, through a statement by its Chair in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 21 February 2002. The Committee called for public submissions and conducted public hearings. Twenty-four submissions were received and eleven organisations appeared before the Committee during its public hearings.

The Standing Committee on Education made two formal recommendations in the Report of its Inquiry, and this Government Response addresses each of those recommendations.

Committee Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Government seriously examine this report, in conjunction with the submissions presented, in considering its expenditure priorities for the upcoming budget.

Government Response

The Government has seriously examined the Report of the Standing Committee and the submissions received during the course of the Committee's Inquiry. These valuable contributions were the subject of close scrutiny by the appropriate agencies and have been woven into the budget development process.

Committee Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government investigate the perception that education funding has declined in real terms and address this in the 2002-03 Budget.

Government Response

The Stanhope Government is committed to maintaining the investment in education and has specifically committed itself to providing \$27m more for school education over the next four years than that proposed by the previous government in its 2001-02 Budget.

The Stanhope Government has maintained education funding using the same real terms methodology as that employed by the previous government. It has also maintained funding for the specific education initiatives contained in the 2001-02 Budget.

The previous government had a commitment to maintain education funding in real terms and, since 1999-00, had provided an explanation in the Budget papers on how that had been achieved.

In addition, there are 12 new education initiatives announced in the 2002-03 Budget which provide further education funding of \$21.2m over the next four years.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

The Standing Committee on Health self-referred an Inquiry on the budget development process on 22 February 2002. The Committee called for public submissions and conducted public hearings. Eighteen submissions were received and ten organisations and individuals appeared before the Committee during its public hearings.

The Standing Committee on Health made one formal recommendation in the Report of its Inquiry, and this Government Response addresses that recommendation.

Committee Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the Treasurer, in developing the ACT budget 2002-03, give detailed consideration to the issues raised in submissions and evidence given to this Committee, and also undertakes detailed analysis of community need.

Government Response

The Government has given detailed consideration to the issues raised in submissions and evidence given before the Standing Committee. These valuable contributions were the subject of close scrutiny by the appropriate agencies and have been woven into the budget development process.

Since coming to office, the Government has provided substantial additional funding to be allocated to the health budget to meet hospital and community needs.

Based on a commitment the Government gave last year, the ACT Department of Health and Community Care is undertaking an empirical analysis of respite needs in the ACT. This will assist in informing Government on the location of the areas of highest need.

In relation to mental health, the Government has recently announced its commitment to developing a new ACT Mental Health Plan. This will be done in consultation with the mental health sector and community. Submissions received by both the Government and Committee have highlighted areas of unmet need. The additional funds committed by the Government will go some way toward addressing unmet need particularly enhancing additional youth services.

This Government has made the challenge of improving health outcomes for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens one of its highest priorities. To this end, we are currently developing our response to the report by the last Assembly Committee on Health and Community Care on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT. We are supporting the strategic planning exercise for Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, which

is currently underway. The exercise is examining needs of clients who access the services, and is considering the best location for the services.

The Government acknowledges the need to address service needs for our rapidly aging population and the Government will consider the proposals put forward.

The Government has committed to the development of a Social Plan, aspects of which will be supported by analysis of unmet community need.

This analysis will address a range of issues such as:

- co-ordination and referral
- location
- physical access to services
- transport options to services
- outreach activities
- costs of accessing services
- gaps in services

Government agencies have already undertaken significant assessment and analysis of service planning and provision. However, to ensure that this work is integrated across Government, and the relevant gaps in service planning are identified, some additional work will be undertaken.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS

The Standing Committee on Legal Affairs announced its intention to participate in the budget development process, through a statement by its Chair in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 21 February 2002. The Committee called for public submissions and decided not to conduct public hearings. Six submissions and a letter were received.

The Standing Committee on Legal Affairs made two formal recommendations in the Report of its Inquiry, and this Government Response addresses each of those recommendations.

Committee Recommendation 1

That the Assembly note the difficulties for any committee inquiry into Budget-related matters that does not have the benefit of a whole-of-government perspective to be provided to the community and the committee at the beginning of the Budget development process.

Government Response

Noted. In its Budget Consultation Paper, the Government set out its broad perspective in formulating the 2002-2003 ACT Budget. The Paper was delayed due to the need to incorporate the findings of the Commission of Audit.

Committee Recommendation 2

That the government carefully and thoughtfully consider the matters raised in the submissions to this committee as it formulates the 2002-03 Budget.

Government Response

The Government has carefully and thoughtfully considered the matters raised in submissions received during the course of the Committee's Inquiry. These valuable contributions were the subject of close scrutiny by the appropriate agencies and have been woven into the budget development process.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment announced its intention to participate in the budget development process, through a statement by its Chair in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 21 February 2002. The Committee called for public submissions and conducted public hearings. Eleven submissions were received and seven organisations appeared before the Committee during its public hearings.

The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment made two formal recommendations in the Report of its Inquiry, and this Government Response addresses each of those recommendations.

Committee Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Government investigate the implementation of programs identified by the committee in its consultation program with the community.

Government Response

The Government has investigated the programs identified by the Standing Committee as part of its consultation program with the community for this Inquiry. These valuable contributions were the subject of close scrutiny by the appropriate agencies and have been woven into the budget development process.

Committee Recommendation 2

The Committee (therefore) recommends that the Government release any budget consultation document with a period of at least six weeks for the committee to consult the community.

Government Response

Noted. The Budget Consultation Paper was delayed due to the need to include important economic and financial data, some of which was being supplied by external agencies.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts announced its intention to participate in the budget development process, through a statement by its Chair in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 21 February 2002. The Committee called for public submissions and conducted public hearings. Four submissions were received and four organisations appeared before the Committee during its public hearings.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts chose not to make any formal recommendations in the Report of its Inquiry, and as such, this Government Response addresses the Conclusions outlined on page seven of the Committee's Report.

Committee Conclusion 1

The Committee is grateful to all those who took the time to make submissions, and to those who appeared to give evidence to the Committee.

Government Response

Noted. The ACT Government agrees that it is important for the community to be engaged in government processes, and supports the Committee's expression of appreciation to those organisations which made submissions and participated in public hearings.

Committee Conclusion 2

The Committee reiterates that it regards this inquiry as limited in that the timeframe did not allow full investigations of areas of unmet need. The Government therefore must undertake its own analysis.

Government Response

Noted. The previous ACT Government committed, prior to the last election, to the development of data and research which would better support the planning of service provision. This commitment was made in response to a lack of accessible and reliable information on which to base future service delivery decisions. This Government has also committed to the development of a Social Plan, aspects of which will be supported by analysis of unmet need.

This analysis will address a range of issues such as:

- co-ordination and referral
- location
- physical access to services

- transport options to services
- outreach activities
- costs of accessing services
- gaps in services

Government agencies have already undertaken significant assessment and analysis of service planning and provision. However, to ensure that this work is integrated across Government, and the relevant gaps in service planning are identified, some additional work will be undertaken.

The non-Government sector will also be able to contribute valuable data on these issues, through a range of consultative processes.

Conclusion

The ACT Government very much appreciates the effort of those community, sports, union, arts, environmental and business groups which supplied the eighty-eight submissions received by the Standing Committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly during the course of their Inquiries into aspects of the 2002-03 ACT Budget. The submissions contained a wide variety of well researched, innovative and progressive proposals, which contributed to making the Government's decisions on the budget a positive, but even more complex, task.

The Government is also very thankful for the effort put in by the Standing Committees, during the process of calling for submissions, conducting public hearings and producing the Reports of their Inquiries.

The Government is particularly appreciative of the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, which made substantive content related recommendations. The Government is somewhat disappointed by the degree of analysis provided by the other Standing Committees, in that there did not appear to be any input from the Committees in relation to the relative priority of the proposals submitted to them.

After having the Treasurer's invitation to participate in this process accepted by the Standing Committees, the Government anticipated that the Committees would 'value add' to the process. The Government was particularly keen to see an overlay of the invaluable community understanding and knowledge which Members possess on the community submissions received.

The 2002-03 ACT Budget tabled on 25 June 2002, is a proud achievement for the Labor Government. This Budget implements our election commitments to rebuild services, integrate sustainability, invest in health, planning, education, economic growth, and promote community engagement and safety.