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Digital Government and Service NL

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

GOVERNMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE

Digital Government and Service NL

Chair: Paul Pike, MHA

Vice-Chair: Loyola O'Driscoll, MHA

Members: Jordan Brown, MHA
Lela Evans, MHA
Scott Reid, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA
Brian Warr, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Bobbi Russell

Appearing:

Digital Government and Service NL

Hon. Sarah Stoodley, MHA, Minister

Gail Boland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital Government and Services

Sean Dutton, Deputy Minister

Dave Heffernan, Associate Deputy Minister

Scott Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister, Regulatory Affairs

Bonnie Steele, Departmental Controller

Also Present

James Dinn, MHA

Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Perry Trimper, MHA

Megan Winter, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West.

The Committee met at 9 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Pike): Good morning, everyone, and welcome.

We do have a few announcements beforehand. We do have two substitutions. We have Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Placentia - St. Mary's; and St. John's Centre, Jim Dinn stepping in this morning. Thank you so much.

The time allocation and so on, we'll certainly look at taking a break if we need one somewhere around 10:15.

We're going to start our questions and debate with the Official Opposition, Third Party, Official Opposition, Third Party and independent Member, in that order.

We need to remind witnesses to identify themselves before you speak for Hansard and wait for the tally light before speaking. I know the last time we were here there were some issues getting the light to come on and so on. But hopefully that'll be okay today. If the light doesn't come on, wave to identify yourself, so we will need that.

The minutes of the previous meeting, do you have a copy? Everybody has a copy? Okay.

Are there any revisions or amendments to those minutes?

Can I have a mover to accept the minutes as presented?

Moved by Mr. O'Driscoll.

So the minutes are moved by Mr. O'Driscoll.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: I'm going to ask now for people to identify themselves before we begin. So we'll start on this side.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Loyola O'Driscoll, the scenic District of Ferryland.

J. DINN: Jim Dinn, the scenic District of St. John's Centre.

P. TRIMPER: Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Researcher for the Third Party caucus.

M. WINTER: Megan Winter, Researcher with the Official Opposition caucus.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

CHAIR: My name, by the way, is Paul Pike. I'm the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

S. DUTTON: Sean Dutton, I'm Deputy Minister of the Department of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Hello, I'm Sarah Stoodley, Minister of Digital Government and Service NL and the MHA for the economic powerhouse District of Mount Scio.

D. HEFFERNAN: Hello. Dave Heffernan and I'm the Associate Deputy Minister for Digital Government and the Chief Information Officer.

G. BOLAND: Gail Boland, Assistant Deputy Minister for Digital Government and Services.

B. STEELE: Bonnie Steele, Departmental Controller.

S. JONES: Scott Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister Regulatory Affairs, Digital Government and Service NL.

CHAIR: Thank you.

We'll start.

CLERK (Russell): 1.1.01 to 1.2.03, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive carry?

Minister.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, everyone, for joining us this morning.

I'd like to give you kind of an introduction to the department for those of you listening at home and those of us in the room. I also wanted to say thank you so much to all of the teams here in the House of Assembly today, spending Thursday morning with us: the Chair, the staff. I'd like to thank Digital Government and Service NL staff for all their work on the budget, getting everything together. Bonnie, our controller, all the financial stuff that she has – I'm sure thousands of pages behind the Estimates that you see here today.

I'd also like to say a special thanks to the Queen's Printer staff who I know, during budget time, stayed up all night printing the Budget Speech, the Estimates and they're kind of the last cog in the wheel in terms of getting all the budget documents for everyone. I just wanted to say a special thank you to them as well.

I think this is my 10th month in Digital Government and Service NL. It's been a wild ride, learning all about the department, with my area of expertise in my past life but then expanding into lots of new areas. Someone once described this department to me as the lint trap of the provincial government. If something doesn't fit in some department, guaranteed it's in Digital Government and Service NL.

Historically, it's been amalgamations where resident-facing services across all departments kind of gather within our department and we find that we enforce a lot legislation and regulations that are maintained in other

departments, but we have the resident-facing enforcement side. We do a lot of licensing, inspections and we're responsible for enforcement of public health and public safety. There are a lot of public safety acts in other departments, but we enforce those acts.

We have vital documents, birth certificates, marriage certificates, all that kind of stuff from Vital Statistics, which I'm sure we'll get to. Occupational Health and Safety, which is a huge part of what we do in the department, making sure that workplaces follow all the rules and making sure that staff have a complaints procedure in place and that that is followed.

One of our, I guess, most visible parts is Motor Registration Division, again, as I'm sure we'll get into in detail. The staff there over two seasons, two high-peak seasons, have had to completely change the way that they deliver services to residents of the province. Going just two years ago from a model where people show up and then you have a waiting room full of people to a complete shift to an appointment system, offering services through phone, drop box and I'm sure we'll talk a lot about that later on.

I've been responsible for shared services, which has recently transitioned to this department. Some of the areas that have amalgamated so far include collections and there have also been some back-office functions. As the government takes over the NLESD and NLCHI, we expect in the short term some of those things to progress as well.

Digital Government and Service NL, we make a lot of money for the provincial government. We have a budget of \$26 million and in the Estimates, you'll see \$9.1 million in revenue, but what's not reported in our Estimates is the \$133.8 million in revenue that our department brings in and that just goes into general revenues that we don't see in the Estimates.

That's everything from the Motor Registration fees that people pay when they renew their vehicle, to electrical permits, for example, if you're getting an electrical permit, the fees for that. Then we're responsible for all the financial services legislation, so if you're a mortgage broker you pay a fee, if you are an investment

dealer you pay a fee. So all those kind of revenues fall within our department, most of which don't get shown in our Estimates in terms of revenues.

Our department has had to pivot drastically during COVID-19 and hopefully we're on the end of that, but we get to, hopefully, keep a lot of the efficiencies that we've gained and the learnings around how to deliver services differently to match what residents are looking for.

We've seen 98 per cent of Motor Registration vehicle renewals happen online, which is outstanding. I would have never guessed that we could achieve that kind of level, 98 per cent, just on resident demand alone. We're doing anything, really, to push people to online but it's been amazing. We have 92 per cent of people renewing their driver's licence online.

We also have the Office of French Services and I'm the Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs as well. That's a small team responsible for training and translation services. We do some services in French and we've added to our French services this year. A lot of what they do is working with the federal government and we spent money from the federal government in helping progress French services.

We also are responsible for the Queen's Printer. I mentioned that but it's an important part. They do all the printing for not only the provincial government but for Eastern Health, for example, and that's at no cost to any of the departments. It's a bit of an interesting challenge because people just ask us for printing and we don't know say no, and all that cost is incurred within our department. We've been trying to make sure that people really need what they're going to print, and we're not wasting paper and we're only printing where necessary. I think we're getting there.

Overall, it's a very interesting department with many, many different facets and I look forward to diving into each one in more detail with you all this morning.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mr. O'Driscoll.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that update.

It's certainly my pleasure to be here this morning. Last year I didn't get to attend. I was off sick last year. It wasn't COVID, which we were hoping it wasn't; it was just the flu. But I was off for a week and I missed the Estimates.

After being here the previous time, I'm going to say, this is a little more of a learning experience for me. After the first time I came in, I was inundated and I had no idea what I was doing when I came in here. Not that I know now, but it's just a different learn, I'm going to say.

From the previous minister or the person that filled in last year, when I started as the critic for this role, he did say that you'd start with a birth certificate and end with a death certificate, so it's everything in between. I would say being here, and this being the start of the third year, I'm going to say that it's the most legislation, I think, in this department. There are people that we had on our side when we were speaking on legislation last year, when you had it, and one of the other people in our caucus had said: How does that work? I said: What do you mean how does it work? He said: Well, I haven't done one before. I said: Gee, I'm after doing seven or eight since I came here. They hadn't done one. So it's a lot of legislation. It might be just a minor tweak, but there's still a lot of legislation.

Anyway, I'll get started. I'm just wondering if we could obtain a copy of the minister's binder when we're finished.

S. STOODLEY: Yeah, of course.

L. O'DRISCOLL: All right. Just some general questions first, I'm going to say.

Is the attrition plan still being followed? If so, what are the changes from last year to this year?

S. STOODLEY: The attrition plan is being followed. In 2020-2021, we had \$82,500 in savings and in the upcoming year, we anticipate \$82,100 in savings, and we are meeting our attrition plan.

Anyone else want to ...? Okay, thank you.

L. O'DRISCOLL: How many retirements have occurred in the last year?

S. STOODLEY: Eight retirements.

L. O'DRISCOLL: How many?

S. STOODLEY: Eight.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Eight. Yeah, okay.

How many people are employed in your department, whether it be permanent, seasonal, temporary and contracted out?

S. STOODLEY: We have 438 positions in Digital Government and Service NL. That's not including staff with us through the Opening Doors Program.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

How many vacancies are not filled in this department?

S. STOODLEY: I do have that. But do you have it top of hand?

Okay, Sean.

S. DUTTON: Out of the 449 positions, 401 were filled as of April 1 and 48 were vacant at the time. (Inaudible) quite a number of board reports since that number was compiled.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you.

Do I have to keep saying my name when it comes back to me?

CHAIR: No.

L. O'DRISCOLL: No, okay. All right.

How many positions have been eliminated and what are they?

S. STOODLEY: I don't have that, but we can certainly get it to you.

I don't know if one of the team – okay. Yeah, we can get that for you.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

How many layoffs have occurred in the department in the last year?

S. STOODLEY: We haven't had any layoffs.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

How many new hires took place in the last year?

S. STOODLEY: Six new hires.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Six.

How many contractual and short-term employees are in your department?

S. STOODLEY: We have 15 active short-term hires at the moment. Sorry, what was the other question?

L. O'DRISCOLL: The contractual and short-term.

S. STOODLEY: Oh, contract. We have seven contract staff.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Did your department receive any funds from the COVID fund? If so, what for?

S. STOODLEY: I'm not aware of any funds that we've received from the COVID fund.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

How has COVID impacted service delivery? Can you please speak about any backlogs, which are occurring, with the various branches within your department?

S. STOODLEY: I guess COVID has significantly impacted our department. Motor Registration, for example, we've completely changed how we deliver services. It used to be that you showed up any day of the week, sat and waited in the waiting room for an hour, all day maybe, to get an appointment. We've shifted to a model where there are multiple channels to get things done. One is you can book an appointment online and book an appointment to come into our office. You can do things by

phone or by drop box. We're trying to drive as many people online as possible for the services available online. You can also do transactions by email and we're working on improving that. Our government services centres closed I think during Level 5, but they're all reopened now.

I guess another thing that would have impacted our department is, for example, inspections. We do a range of inspections. During Level 5, for example, we wouldn't have gone out to do any non-urgent inspections. Once things started opening up in Level 4 and Level 3, we then prioritized all the inspections and then did the highest priority ones.

I'll look to the team to talk about, I guess, whether we've caught up yet. Gail, is there anything else you can think of?

G. BOLAND: We've done a number of things, as Minister Stoodley has identified. We also put online your learner's permit; that was an initiative that happened the fall. We also made some adjustments to some of the requirements as it relates to MRD. For example, under Alert Level 5, due to public health, there was nobody coming into the building. Photo IDs were suspended temporarily for anybody who needed a new photo for their driver's licence. We also temporarily suspended routine medical reports. Those are some of the things that we had changed.

In terms of backlog, we're still working through some of the in-car driver testing, the road testing, but for the most part, I think we have addressed all of them, as well as the photo IDs. Recently, too, with respect to the front-counter service in Mount Pearl, we've been doing a lot of reconfiguration in respect of the Public Health guidelines. In the higher alert levels when we were allowed to open to the public we would have three front counters being serviced and now we've actually opened them all. As a consequence, within the last two weeks, we were able to add another 35 appointments per day at Mount Pearl.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: I'll just mention a few other things. For example, the Registry of Deeds, we had to shut those types of services during Level

5 and then gradually reopened them on an appointment basis and things like that. All those other types of services are open now.

I don't know, Scott, if you wanted to add anything.

S. JONES: Like the minister mentioned, the commercial registry, there are two aspects of it: There's the registration of the deeds and corporate registration and there's also the search. The registration side of it is mostly continued, except for, obviously, during the lockdown at Level 5. But staff have been available and there to continue the registration process where companies would send their corporate information or an individual would send their deeds information, again, either through the mail, courier or the drop box. That's all being registered and is available online for searches, except for significantly old documents that still remain printed in the registry. Then there's an appointment system in place, as the minister mentioned, for individuals and professionals, lawyers and deed searchers to come in and search those records.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

You did the permits online for new drivers, so is that open again now that they can go in and do it, or is that still online or both?

S. STOODLEY: Oh, it's both.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Both, okay.

S. STOODLEY: I think they only stopped in person for a short while. We are finding a lot more people doing them online now. I can give you the numbers. Let's see – sorry, we have so many services online.

L. O'DRISCOLL: No problem.

S. STOODLEY: I should have it here. Anyway, we can get that for you.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah, when you find it you can just say it when you speak.

S. STOODLEY: Okay.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Did your department receive any funds from the contingency fund? If so, what was it for?

S. STOODLEY: No, we didn't receive any funds.

Dave, do we have the numbers?

D. HEFFERNAN: For online drivers' exams, we've had 19,560 people attempt to do their exam online.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Last year, in Estimates, we talked about a joint project with the federal government, I believe it was called death notification project. Could you please give me some more information on this project and is it still underway?

S. STOODLEY: I'm going to pass that over to Dave to give an update.

D. HEFFERNAN: The electronic death notification project is still underway. It's a combination project between the Department of Digital Government and Service NL. It's in Scott's area. It's also combined with the Office of the CIO. It's a joint effort then with the federal government. The federal government has provided funding for it. If I'm not mistaken, I believe it's scheduled to clue up in August.

S. JONES: Yeah, the significant work is to clue up in August on it. They're in the final stages now with respect to dealing with some information from NLCHI that would facilitate the conclusion of the progress. Total implementation is expected in '21-'22 but the internal work is with negotiations and contact with the funeral directors, funeral homes is expected to be clued up by August.

L. O'DRISCOLL: What happens after the implementation is over? How does it proceed from there? The funding is finished so what goes on from there?

S. JONES: Basically, it's a change from the current process of just printed documents, signatures and forms to an online process. There's no additional costs being incurred by anybody. All the costs related to this initiative is

going to be covered through this federal funding that is being provided. It allows for, like I say, an online delivery of information on deaths to Vital Statistics from funeral homes or from the health provider, the hospital. It will allow a 15-day timeline to be able to communicate that information to CRA and the federal government as required for their purposes, which is why the federal government is funding this initiative. Newfoundland and Labrador is the first that the federal government has partnered with on this.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

The Budget Speech reads in: "In an increasingly digital world, now more than ever, citizens expect that governments be innovative and deliver faster, easier access to services in a secure manner. This year, we will build on the success of MyGovNL and take further steps and improve service delivery to ensure better interactions with government." Could you please outline the plans to do this?

S. STOODLEY: Sure, thank you.

This is kind of Digital Government and Service NL and OCIO, and it's kind of both under me. I know we're going to talk about OCIO this afternoon. We have a digital team – there are a few different teams – but one of them works on MyGovNL, specifically. We have a big backlog of services, so they do one and they do the next and they do the next. We try to prioritize based on value to residents, then also internal efficiency is important to the departments.

We also have an internal team working on more commercial-facing. So applying for permits and things like that, where if you're a contractor you can apply online for a permit. So those types of things, there is another team working on those.

We don't have a huge budget or anything for this. It's mostly money that we're finding internally or we're stopping doing things to fund additional services online for residents.

Dave, I don't know if you want to add anything?

D. HEFFERNAN: So the minister's correct, there's a team working on an upgrade of what we call our AMANDA platform, but it's a licensing and permitting platform that will allow

us to put 30 to 40 new services online that aren't online today. So that's one part of it.

The minister mentioned there are a number of services that sort of roll out as we go through the project. We don't have a predefined list that says we're going to do 10 of these. We're always looking at what makes the most sense at the right time. So there's a list of those that we're working through this year.

We're in the process of upgrading them on the MyGovNL platform, because it's been there now for close to two years, I guess. So, basically, we're going to the next version of that platform, which will allow us to put more business-facing services online as well, which we don't have today. It's mostly resident-facing.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Also, the Budget Speech reads: "We are also embarking on a process to maintain and improve service delivery through joint solutions, in partnership with business, social enterprises or other organizations to more effectively deliver facilities management and provincial registries." I note that provincial registries are mentioned here and that the department is responsible for many of them. Could you please outline any changes or analyses you are carrying out on the provincial registries and changes you're considering?

CHAIR: I know our time is up, but you can answer that question (inaudible).

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you.

S. STOODLEY: Okay, perfect.

I'll answer, I'll probably throw it to Sean as well to fill in anything I've missed.

Absolutely, we have multiple registries in our department. Motor Registration is the big one, we have Registry of Deeds and commercial registries. So over the next coming months we will be looking at doing RFPs or RFIs or whatever to kind of go out to the community to see if anyone can help us do that better.

I know Minister Coady has mentioned multiple times, whether it be a social enterprise, a union

or a private company, looking at if we can leverage some of their expertise and their systems, for example, to offer the service to residents at better value for taxpayers. I've been looking at this a lot, personally. I know Alberta has gone back and forth between having a private-run versus a public-run motor registration. Nova Scotia I think has just done an analysis and they've decided to keep it internally. Because some of the big consideration is the back-end system.

For Motor Registration, our back-end system is very old and it needs updating. A lot of the new things we want to do for residents in terms of licence plates and all that, we really need a new system to do that, but a new system is tens of millions of dollars. So is there a way that, perhaps, we can leverage a vendor or an outside company who is doing this in another province to maybe offer that, to provide better value to taxpayers?

Again, we're just going to be looking at that option. I know, as other provinces have learned, in the end maybe we'll decide to keep it internally; maybe we'll decide to have a partner come in and help us with that. But that's what we're going to be looking at over the coming months.

Sean –

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

No, I'm going to have to cut it there now and we can get back to it after. Is that okay?

S. STOODLEY: Okay.

CHAIR: All right.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Reid and Mr. Warr, who've joined the meeting. Thank you.

Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, just in case I don't get to do this at the end, thank you for appearing and for answering the questions and certainly I thank you for the work you're doing, especially during COVID.

Just a few questions leading into this. I find it interesting, Minister, you called your department the lint trap, yet we all know that the lint trap, if we didn't have it in a dryer you'd probably have a lot more house fires, so I'd like to think that it performs a very valuable service, a lint trap or otherwise, whatever you call it.

Highway cameras, I know last year that was passed. I'm just wondering what the progress is to date on highway traffic cameras.

Oh, and before I go on, I'm assuming that whatever information my colleague to the left has asked we'll get it and vice versa.

S. STOODLEY: Yeah, we'll certainly provide it as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

S. STOODLEY: Last fall we did pass legislation enabling cameras to be used to ticket people who kind of speed, because before that a physical person had to be there to verify it and so the legislation we passed no longer requires that.

We're working on multiple regulations, I guess, for the *Highway Traffic Act*. The first are dealer regulations, which I think are done now.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

S. STOODLEY: Yeah. So that kind of modernizes how we work with dealers.

This is very important to me. We have been working on the regulations, which should be not too much longer. Part of the challenge, which we've been working on internally, is how do we propose regulations that facilitate anyone who wants to use speed cameras? For example, whether you're the City of Mount Pearl or the RNC or a private company – a private company was probably a bad example. But if a body wants to use speed cameras – for example, on school buses, the NLESD – right now, it's not integrated into our system to be able to enable that, but we have passed the legislation.

We're fine-tuning the proposed regulations to, I guess, make sure that we have, for example, all the privacy considerations. I know we've been

working with the Privacy Commissioner on that. Because especially with cameras taking a picture in a car, there are a lot of privacy considerations around that, and because we don't have the software and the technical solution readily available, we're trying to build the regulations to ensure that we account for any privacy concerns of whatever solution will be in place to implement.

I don't know if, Gail or Sean, you want to add to that.

S. DUTTON: Sure.

I would just note that, again, the regulations are very close to being prepared and once they're completed, they'll be published in the Gazette. Again, we have to ensure that they're written in such a way that if a result is obtained, it's deemed by the court to be a true result for the purpose of enforcing a ticket or other charge.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I guess there's a reasonable expectation of privacy in certain settings; however, if I'm out in the car on a public road, that expectation of privacy is significantly diminished. I'm thinking here in terms of cameras. This is probably not in your wheelhouse here, but the number of cars that are going around now with tinted side and front windows. Basically, they're designed, I would assume, to mask the identity of the driver. I would assume that if you're a driver, I should be able to see your face, especially if I need to see your eyes. It's a safety issue as well. If I'm a pedestrian, I want to know if you're looking at me, can see me. I'm just curious about it.

S. STOODLEY: Actually, that is our department as well. It is illegal to have tinted windows from the driver in front. It shouldn't be allowed. The law enforcement needs to be able to see the driver.

Gail, I don't know if you want to add anything?

G. BOLAND: Yeah, what you're describing is exactly what we're trying to work through. The technology that's used determines what picture gets taken of the vehicle. There is technology out there that would take a picture of the licence plate as well as whoever is in the vehicle, and

then whoever the vendor is would be responsible, then, for cropping out any pictures of people and making sure that it's just on the licence plate. Then you have other technology, which can configure from a 'pixology' perspective and just take the licence plate. So those are types of things that we are working through.

J. DINN: Good.

Then what about the use of drones, too, and technology as a police tool? Is that something anticipated by this legislation as well?

S. STOODLEY: We can certainly go back and check to see how that would apply. I'm not sure off the top of my head.

J. DINN: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: Gail?

G. BOLAND: The amendments that were made with the *Highway Traffic Act* spoke to basically two types of technology, whether it's mounted or mobile.

J. DINN: Okay.

G. BOLAND: That's what we'd be considering.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In this new digital age, online expense forms. I'm thinking about MHAs. In my former life, I filled out an online expense form; electronic signature, sent it off, done. Here it seems it's not only do I fill it out electronically, but I have to make a paper copy and do a wet signature. I'm trying to think where the savings are in this, because it has to be the most cumbersome, inefficient, archaic system I've ever seen.

To me, I came from a world where I filled out the electronic form, sent it off, done, all straightened away. For God's sake, can you make that more efficient and do a better job? Because it has to cost more money than you're saving.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you for the question. Specifically, MHA expenses – I agree with you completely – are extremely onerous. That's

probably maybe for the Management Commission, because I think that there's a process and policy and also a technology element there.

But we have a big long list of services for residents. There are hundreds of things on the list that need to have their process reviewed and improved and moved online. We kind of prioritize things based on the volume of users who are going to do them, the amount of internal efficiency. Some people, for example, if you're applying for electrical permits and you're working on a construction site, you don't want to fill in a paper form and you don't have access to a printer and a fax, so there's a range of things that we look at in prioritizing.

I guess we'd be happy to work with the House of Assembly to add expense forms – which I agree with you. Any House of Assembly things we can certainly work with the House of Assembly and add those to the list. We have a lot of high volume. I think about the 40 MHAs; it's inconvenient for us but, in the grand scheme of things, there are higher bangs for our bucks that the government can spend.

J. DINN: No, I understand. I'm just thinking, then, in terms of such a simple fix and since the only one who has access to my computer is going to be me, and even at home. That's another matter; I'll talk about that in a minute, maybe.

Road deterioration and weigh scales, I asked to ask this question in particular: What is the status on provincial weigh scales? They're only open during the day and the concern is that transport trucks carrying heavy loads can easily time their movements to avoid being weighed through. Is there any plan to deal with that, or how is that being dealt with? I'm not necessarily sure that the deterioration, the ruts in the roads is actually the cause of ATVs because if you look at the wheelbase, it's probably more cars that are doing the damage than trucks.

S. STOODLEY: I'm going to direct that to, I guess, Gail or Sean.

G. BOLAND: With respect to our weigh stations, we have 32 highway enforcement officers across the Island and in Labrador, and

all of our highway enforcement officers work shiftwork to maximize the amount of time that they're at the weigh scales. As well, we shift, so in areas where we might not have a high number of highway enforcement officers, our staff will not work the same hours all the time. We try to keep everybody on their toes.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Here's another one – I don't know if it's anywhere else in the province, but it's certainly growing here in St. John's and that's the use of bicycles being converted to motorized bicycles. I know where it's being done, as I've found out accidentally, but still the fact is that they're not regulated is my concern and they seem to be growing. Certainly, they go a lot faster than a bicycle – a lot faster – and I don't know how safe they are.

S. STOODLEY: So there are a few things there, I guess, and I'll also pass it over to Gail. We are completely revamping our ATV and snowmobile legislation, that all-terrain vehicle. We've done a complete review; I've talked about that in Question Period and stuff as well. From a safety perspective, as well as just practical things – for example, side-by-sides are not considered in our current legislation whatsoever.

When I bring that legislation forward, I anticipate that to have an impact to kind of any street-worthy or non-street-worthy vehicle that one might see.

Gail, I don't know if you wanted to add anything else about homemade electric bikes. I guess that's what you're talking about.

J. DINN: No. They're gas-powered.

S. STOODLEY: Gas-powered, okay.

J. DINN: They're gas-powered bikes, but they've been converted. Bicycles that have been converted to this.

S. STOODLEY: Right, okay.

G. BOLAND: Like the minister had said, we are considering various types of off-road vehicles. Through that process, we will consider

those sorts of situations as well. Things are evolving every day, and sometimes it takes a little time to get caught up with all the changes, the new things, the technology and that sort of thing as well.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you, Mr. Dinn.

Mr. Trimper.

CLERK: (Inaudible) back to the Official Opposition (inaudible).

CHAIR: Sorry, Mr. Trimper.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you.

You were getting to finishing off on the registries. He was going to touch on it.

S. STOODLEY: Oh, sure.

S. DUTTON: As the minister said, the commitment in the budget was to consider and look at alternatives for the registries. Again, we're looking at the practices in other jurisdictions. Alberta, in addition to the review they did previously on the motor registration, have initiated a procurement process around the registries for deeds and companies just in January. So we'll be looking at all of those types of examples and determining what's the best approach going forward. I guess the biggest challenge – this was mentioned – is the cost of the IT infrastructure and to the capital costs around their inevitable need for replacement.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you.

Just to go back, our colleague there just asked about cameras and stuff. I know that on vehicles when they come into dealerships, they come in with a certain tint. So you're talking about being able to see on the side. There's a certain tint that they can only put on them and any vehicles that are darkened out are done – I'm just going to call it 0.5 because I don't know the measurement but after you go above that, it's illegal to do it. So the police, really, it's an enforcement that if they were going to do that that's how they would enforce it, I'm going to say, on that part.

Also, on cameras, right now – and just because I came from a dealership – they have rear trucks,

vehicles, I'm going to say, pickups have front and rear plates and cars just have rear plates. Most times when people come in to buy a truck, as an example – so if you're using cameras, you're looking at the front and rear. When they come in to buy a truck they say: Don't put the plate on the front. Sometimes there's a bracket on it and sometimes there's not, so they put two plates on the back and put the second one underneath. So if you're looking at that it's a camera thing and you may have to enforce that going through the dealerships if you're looking at that.

I'm just going to get on to section 1.2.01, under Employee Benefits.

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, just a second now.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I'll let you catch up.

S. STOODLEY: 1.2.01, yeah.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Employee Benefits went over budget last year, \$78,400 was budgeted but \$127,000 was spent; could you please provide some detail on that?

S. STOODLEY: The increase of \$48,700 there was due to higher workers' compensation charges.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Could you please outline where this revenue comes from and what accounts for the variance in it?

S. STOODLEY: Which one, sorry?

L. O'DRISCOLL: Under Revenue - Provincial, sorry.

S. STOODLEY: Oh, sure.

The decrease in \$100,600 is due to lower cost-recovery revenue of salaries and administrative costs related to Occupational Health and Safety. We essentially bill back all of our Occupational Health and Safety costs that get incurred by WorkplaceNL, and so based on the percentage of actual expenditures, I guess, we had fewer costs to recover.

I don't know, Bonnie, if you wanted to add anything to that.

B. STEELE: No, we bill quarterly and just for the costs that are incurred sometimes there might be a timing difference of when we received the money, but all the billings do go out.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Under 1.2.03, Administrative Support, under Purchased Services, could you please detail what Purchased Services fall in this line item and what accounts for the variance?

S. STOODLEY: 1.2.03.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah, under Purchased Services.

S. STOODLEY: Purchased Services, okay.

There's the cost of the death registration project that was carried forward. There's a two-year project cost of \$265,000, plus \$105,000 carried forward because there was a delay in the start of that project, for the death registration project we talked about.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment: There's an unbudgeted expenditure here of \$97,000. Can you explain that?

S. STOODLEY: The Queen's Printer bought a new printer, essentially, and so that's the \$97,000 cost for the new printer.

L. O'DRISCOLL: All right.

Under Revenue - Federal: I note that last year there was \$320,000 anticipated but not received, why not?

S. STOODLEY: There's a decrease of \$290,000 due to revenue from the federal government that was received and deferred over two years and this is then offset by \$30,000 in additional federal funding for the death registration project. Yes, okay.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

That's it for me on 1.2.03. That's where it ends, right? That's as far as we're going on this section. Okay, so I'm good there.

Thank you.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Do I get my colleague's minutes, too? No? Thought I'd ask.

Is it possible right now to have how work is proceeding on the new accessibility legislation?

S. STOODLEY: Yeah, just a second. We have a committee, an advisory group – (inaudible) my notes here on that just to make sure I give you the best – yes.

We are working on changes to the *Buildings Accessibility Act*. The Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board has been working on recommendations for me. I have not yet seen those recommendations, but they've undertaken a review.

I don't know if anyone wants to add anything. Sean?

S. DUTTON: Yes, so the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board, they were tasked with carrying out consultations with key stakeholders and developing recommendations. We're told that they are very close to having that process completed. So we should be receiving that in the not-too-distant future.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Can we have an update on the plan to move from a plate-to-vehicle to a plate-to-owner system?

S. STOODLEY: My understanding is a part of the challenge with that is our current system. I don't know. Gail, do you want to ...? I guess when we look at whether or not to implement a joint solution for the Motor Registration Division, and I think that's one of the key considerations.

I don't know. Gail, do you want to expand on that?

G. BOLAND: Yes, Minister Stoodley is correct in that our current mainframe system does not support that ability. As a part of that, we have gone and looked with our Atlantic partners and actually visited New Brunswick and we looked at their system, trying to determine the best fit for us. Recently OCIO went to market on a request for information related to a number of older mainframe systems, which would've included MRD mainframe systems. So, for right now, we don't have the ability because it's a system issue.

J. DINN: Is it possible to track when someone decides to cancel their insurance? Because there are cars that are – drivers going around without insurance, so obviously they had to present it when they licensed, but there's nothing that – they cancelled after. Is there any way in which the insurance company can say they've cancelled the insurance and then that's flagged?

S. STOODLEY: That is a technology solution that is almost ready to go, where insurance companies will be able to tell us whenever someone cancels their insurance and that will go directly to the Motor Registration Division.

J. DINN: Yeah, that's excellent news.

I think you've talked about this in terms of the motorized bicycles that we touched on. The review of the *Motorized Snow Vehicles and All-Terrain Vehicles Act* is completed and currently with the Cabinet. Can we have an update on the progress of updating the legislation? Anything we talked about in terms of motor vehicles. Are there any specifics about updating the legislation? Can we expect to see it this year coming?

S. STOODLEY: Well, it's in my mandate letter and it is a priority. We've done a complete review of all the legislation. Just to give you an example: In terms of mandatory helmets, we're the only province in Canada that does not have mandatory helmets for ATV use. So it is a priority. I can't tell you – it's up to the Government House Leader and the internal processes, but it is in my mandate letter and it is important for the government.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

The death notices, the death notification project, so this is meant to streamline the process, I take it, right?

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

J. DINN: I do remember when my aunt died they had stopped paying her CPP but they still wanted proof she was dead. Which I found – I think you already had that already. So that’s designed to eliminate – it’s more expensive and complicated to get out of this world than to come into it.

Okay, under 1.1.01, Salaries: What was the reason for last year’s savings of \$50,000?

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, 1.1.01?

J. DINN: Minister’s Office.

S. STOODLEY: 1.1.01, as you recall, Minister Osborne was the minister of Digital Government and Service NL for a while, as well as his EA, and so I guess additional ministerial costs were not incurred during that time.

J. DINN: I’m sorry; say that again, they weren’t incurred at that time?

S. STOODLEY: Well, because he was the minister of Finance and so you only get one – so, essentially, we didn’t incur costs while he was minister.

J. DINN: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: So he saved us money by –

J. DINN: I’ll have to compliment him on that then.

S. STOODLEY: Yeah. That goes the same for his EA; that was another cost we didn’t incur.

J. DINN: Thank you.

1.2.01, Salaries: The reduction of this year’s Estimates by \$23,000, is that to do with the loss of a pay period and maybe mitigated by step increases?

S. STOODLEY: Correct. The 2 per cent – the pay increase that we have to pay out.

J. DINN: Thank you.

1.2.02, French Language Services: The reason for the \$5,000 – it’s not much overspending last year, it’s just more. What would the reason be for that? Just a normal variance or was there something (inaudible)?

S. STOODLEY: Which line item is that, sorry?

J. DINN: It’s 1.2.02. I think it was a total of \$5,000 – no, more than that. In Salaries.

S. STOODLEY: Oh, Salaries, okay.

J. DINN: Then it’s dropped back down.

S. STOODLEY: That’s the elimination of the 27th pay period again and then the wage increase.

J. DINN: Okay.

Under 1.2.03: This whole section is then related to the death notification project.

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

J. DINN: Correct.

I think, Mr. Chair, that might be it. I’ll just make absolutely sure I have that covered.

With regard to one comment you made, Minister, at the – well, actually, I think you said there’s 98 per cent of vehicle registration and 92 per cent –

S. STOODLEY: Driver’s licence renewals.

J. DINN: Licences. Just two quick comments.

I know, because we do the online registration for both my mother and mother-in-law, so I would say that there are an awful lot of families who are doing that and there are people, then, who don’t have that luxury of sometimes having family nearby and they’re totally at sea with doing it.

The only other comment I will make is in terms of the backlog. I know you're working, your department and motor vehicle is working diligently to eliminate it. I know a couple of months ago I had people who were trying to get through and they weren't getting calls returned. Most recently I had to respond to two constituents, one of whom I'm married to, but at the same time trying to be nimble with it. Plus the mechanic at our garage said the earliest he can get the date to transfer the truck to his father was July 6. So I just want you to be aware of that. From what I understand, the people who we eventually spoke to are most helpful, but it's a bit of a wait for some people. Especially if something comes up suddenly that they need to move on it quickly.

S. STOODLEY: The department, over two high seasons, essentially, has had to shift completely how they operate and it's still a learning process.

Last summer we put in a new kind of contact centre technology that had much more sophisticated phone capabilities. Then during the low season we were allowing people to leave a voicemail, for example, but then up until a few weeks ago we were getting 1,800 voicemails a day, which is not feasible and not a good use of our time to listen to all those voicemails and then call people back because you're spending twice the amount of time helping someone as, you know, just talking to them once. So it is kind of a learning process and we are making changes to get to as many people as we can and as quickly as we can.

We're also doing a lot of work to improve the website because people come there, as their first point of entry, to figure out: What do I do? What do I need? How can I do something? So making sure that information is really clear and that people know the channels available to them to process the transaction. Because there are a lot of things you can do by sending us an email. You don't need to necessarily schedule an appointment. We're trying to make the website as clear as possible so that people can have the easiest channel available to them to get what they need done.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you so much.

Now, Mr. Trimper.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's really good to be here today. Of the different departments I've had the opportunity to serve with, this was definitely one of my favourites. It's just good to be back with Service NL, it was at the time. Anyway, I'm enjoying it. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to speak and interact with this good group of people.

Just an opening comment: I'm just hoping that the social club atmosphere still persists there in that department. To me, I don't know if it's still on the go, but it was certainly very unique of what I saw in government. I hope so for your sakes.

I had a couple of questions about Francophone Affairs and French Services. I'm trying to recall what the contribution was that we were receiving from the federal government years ago. Maybe, the controller or the minister, you may know, but we were lobbying for additional funding. I'm not sure if the \$350,000 represents an increase or that's the same number we've had for many years.

S. STOODLEY: I'll throw that over to Sean or Bonnie.

S. DUTTON: No, it's the same. There was no increase. It was renewed for a five-year period, but at the same level as the previous five-year agreement.

P. TRIMPER: Yeah, that's too bad, because I can recall that it was tied to, I think, an archaic understanding of our situation. That's too bad. At least it's still there, and we appreciate that.

Next, I just wondered if the minister could update on what additional services could be offered en Français that you may be working on, the collective department.

S. STOODLEY: A part of when we're looking at adding a new service, we also look at: Can we add a service in French? Recently, this wasn't necessarily related to our department in terms of services, but as my role as Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs, if you noticed the last emergency alert that went out on your phones it was in English and French. We, I believe, have a commitment internally that whenever there's

enough notice, whenever we can have a translation done quickly enough that the alerts will go out in English and French, the emergency alerts.

This year we recently added processing for birth certificates in French. We do have to recognize the volume of people who do transactions in French are lower, and so we have to prioritize that with driving value for taxpayers.

P. TRIMPER: Right on. Certainly, in my experience there was no more appreciative group than the francophone speakers in this province, so that's great.

S. STOODLEY: I did meet with Minister Joly, federally, just a few weeks ago. I did essentially ask her for more funding to support French online services. She indicated that was mentioned to her from many ministers across the country and that she'd be looking at that in the future. There's no funding currently for that, but potentially in the future.

P. TRIMPER: I asked her that five years ago, so keep going (inaudible).

Jumping around a little bit. Electrical inspections: I appreciate what the department does, your team that – you know, this challenge in Labrador of having an electrical inspector for those companies that are building something and they don't have somebody who has a Red Seal and having to bring that in. Have we ever thought about engaging, contracting, perhaps, a company that does have a Red Seal and who could inspect? I know they're working with competition, but would there be – I suspect there'd be quite a bit of efficiency there instead of flying someone in to do a few jobs as they get stacked up.

S. STOODLEY: I'm going to pass that over to Gail or Sean.

G. BOLAND: Unfortunately, no, I'm not aware that that has been considered; although, I'm really new to the department. I'm not sure if Sean would have any recollection either. No.

P. TRIMPER: Well, I'll toss it out there just as a suggestion. It comes without warning, you suddenly get two or three job sites that require

an inspector and we're reaching out through the MHA offices and to your EAs to say: Can we get somebody up to quickly look at a bunch of sites? With that short building season could that possibly be done, I wonder, to have someone just appointed locally to help with that?

Helmets: This is going to be such a challenge. I'm a full supporter. I understand, I have seen and I lost a colleague that worked in government with me four years ago, again, not wearing a helmet. I get it. I get it loud and clear. Culturally we are going to have a great challenge in Labrador. However I can help, I'm available. I'm not sure what else to say other than this is going to be challenging.

Can I get an update on taxi insurance, and how it's going with trying to see what we can do to reduce the rates? Are we still seeing – I haven't heard of a threatened strike in some time. As George Murphy's passing this week, I felt I needed to ask about taxi rates.

S. STOODLEY: I think as a result of COVID-19, people are driving less, unfortunately. But we have not seen applications to the Public Utilities Board for rate increases. Obviously, the Public Utilities Board regulates insurance – or they work with the insurance on price, I mean. So we have not seen any recent price increase applications.

I don't know, Scott, if you wanted to add to that, from the taxi perspective.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

S. JONES: Okay.

Go ahead, Sean.

S. DUTTON: Yes, so a number of reforms were implemented in 2019 and most of those announced at the conclusion of the review have been implemented. So that had included a reduction by half in the commission rate for taxis and limousines with the Facility Association. Facility was also to establish risk-sharing pools to help for high-risk drivers. That's been implemented and you can find the risk-sharing pools information online on the Facility Association website.

Many of the other changes would also have a potential benefit to all motorists, including taxi drivers. Again, while it hasn't seen any initial results around changes in rates, there hasn't been an increase. We have heard from the insurance industry that they continue to have concerns about the affordability of the product. There's some further consolidation happening in the insurance industry, which is probably not conducive to additional competition.

P. TRIMPER: Well, congratulations. I remember that was a big list that just seemed to grow every time two or three boxes were checked. So well done.

I'm going to stop there, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Do you have (inaudible)?

L. O'DRISCOLL: Well, I have more questions, but it was in the (inaudible).

S. STOODLEY: Next section.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah, next section.

CHAIR: Okay. We're okay with this section?

Okay.

Clerk.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.03, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03 carried.

CHAIR: Now, Clerk.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive, Regulatory Affairs.

CHAIR: Now, Mr. O'Driscoll.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a couple of questions on the previous one and just to touch on them. A road test backlog, what is it, by region? Would you be able to tell us that?

S. STOODLEY: Road test backlog?

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yes.

S. STOODLEY: Road tests are pretty good. The longest backlog at the moment, obviously, is in Mount Pearl. The next road test appointment is July 8, as of yesterday. In many areas of the province, you can get a road test within a day or two. We can certainly provide a more detailed breakdown.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah.

If Harbour Grace has less of a backlog, any thought of bringing an examiner in for a couple of days or a week to take care of that backlog, or is that something that can't happen?

S. STOODLEY: It's about two weeks in Harbour Grace right now.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Oh, is it?

S. STOODLEY: Yeah.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay. What would it cost to add a Saturday appointment to help eliminate the backlog?

S. STOODLEY: Well, we're looking at do we have extended hours and that sort of stuff. We are looking at ways to reduce the backlog, especially during high season, absolutely.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah. I know that due to COVID, obviously, there's a backlog. Nice to get it out of your way and get back to square, I'd say. That'd be my ...

S. STOODLEY: Yeah.

L. O'DRISCOLL: On the plate to owner, obviously it's something I know that the system can't do right now, but I'm thinking that government at some point in time are going to have to invest and do that, because I think it's a great move. Just coming from a car dealership and just any individual. I know that a lot of times people sell their car and don't sign the registration. If you take that and send it in, then you're off the hook. But sometimes people forget to do that, and somebody buys a car, doesn't insure it, takes it and drives it. That's where you get the people with \$30,000 and \$40,000 worth of fines. I'm sure that you're running into that.

Again, it's good to hear the insurance – because the only way you could follow a vehicle for insurance purposes, if you had a contract on it and you owed money, they would notify the bank and the bank would notify that person that you have to get insurance on your car because they have a contract on it if it was written off. So it's good to see that's something that you're implementing. How is that going to work?

S. DUTTON: We're working with the Insurance Bureau of Canada. I guess there was a system years ago that was all paper-based. You can imagine that was very unwieldy and was discontinued, so it wasn't particularly effective. So we need an electronic solution. I guess one of the issues we'll have to resolve is that Insurance Bureau and the insurance companies can provide the information.

We'll have to ensure that those people in Facility Association are also notified, because people may switch from – cancelling their insurance and then they have to go into Facility or they get out of Facility and go into insurance. It's a bit complicated amongst the parties to make sure that we the full picture of whether, in fact, a driver is insured or not.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah, I think that's important, because you're getting people with \$30,000 and \$40,000 worth of fines that you're never going to recover. They buy these cars for \$500, \$1,000, put them on the road, don't insure them and away they go until they get caught again and then they rack up another – and they're never going to pay them. Somewhere

along the way, we have to figure that out. I know it's not easy. It's certainly complicated.

All right, moving on to 2.1.01, under Salaries. Last year, Salaries came in under budget by \$69,200. Can you please outline why?

S. STOODLEY: That's a result of vacancies during the year in the department.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Under Revenue - Provincial, can you please explain where this revenue comes from?

S. STOODLEY: So the increase in \$200 is due to higher volume of residential tenancy hearing applications we received.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

What is the current caseload for Residential Tenancies and how has COVID impacted that?

S. STOODLEY: I'll pass it over to Scott in a minute, but during COVID-19, we changed how we did the appointments. You used to gather in a small room, and I understand the social distancing couldn't be maintained and everything, so we had to shift to virtual appointments and/or bigger spaces. I know one of the challenges we've had is that we have three residential tenancy adjudicators. That's quite an important and difficult job, adjudicating those hearings, but we've been down one out of three for a while now.

Scott, I don't know if you want to add anything to that?

S. JONES: Just to give you some statistics. Like the minister mentioned, we've moved from the hearings being held inside a confined space to having virtual hearings during the COVID period so that we could adhere to Public Health measures. Also, as the minister mentioned, we have three residential tenancy adjudicators that are located at various locations across the province and we have had a long-term vacancy in one. There has been a bit of a challenge on scheduling hearings in that one. The good news on that is that just prior to coming in this morning we had approval to make an offer on filling that vacancy. We should be able to do –

any kind of backlog, as opposed to two people dealing with it, there will be three people dealing with it. That's good news there.

On the statistics in particular, in 2018, there were just over 1,000 dispute hearings and in 2019, there were just over 1,200. Of course, the past couple of years, because of COVID, that's reduced. During 2020, it was down to just under 800 and we have just over 300 so far this year. Of those 300, there are 170 that are scheduled and will be heard over the coming weeks and months.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Under 2.1.02, under Salaries: Last year Salaries came in under budget by \$215,000. Can you explain or outline why?

S. STOODLEY: Yes. We had some vacancies: two examiners, one investigator and one policy analyst. Those vacancies meant we were under on our Salaries line item.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Will they be filled this year, those vacancies. Is that something that you're ...?

S. STOODLEY: Scott, I don't know if you want to talk about ...

S. JONES: Yes, actually, we are in the process now of revising the organizational structure to enhance services to the licensee applicants and consumers, including moving from a completely paper-based system into an online system that will allow applicants and licensees to submit their renewals electronically. Also, as a part of the revised structure, we're taking a renewed focus on the examination, investigation side. We're in the final stages of updating the position descriptions to reflect the recent restructure. In the meantime, just on May 26, we had a new examiner start and we have a policy individual started in April as well. Some of these positions are being filled as we work through the revised structure at the same time.

L. O'DRISCOLL: As someone that gets hired, what criteria would you need to be hired to do those kind of exams or licensing, whatever you have to do there? Is there some special course that you have to have? What's expected?

S. JONES: Each position has its position description and the description is done through analysis with the Treasury Board Secretariat. Through the various classifications and based on what is needed to perform the job itself, there are varying qualifications, educational qualifications and experience qualifications to be able to meet the minimum criteria for the job.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Under Purchased Services: Could you please provide some information about the types of services that were purchased and included in that line item?

S. STOODLEY: The difference, I guess, between the \$2,900 is as we move more things online we incur different types of fees for paying for things online. As well as right now our vendor, Moneris, they process payments, and the Moneris fees have gone up, particularly because of all the online services that we're driving. Finance, I believe, has the contract with Moneris, but we are all working together to see if we can change the contract or if there are other ways to enable online payments to save more money. Unfortunately, we ended up spending more in Moneris fees this year to process all those online payments.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Under section 2.1.04 – I think I'm allowed to go that far, am I? I think it is, yes.

Purchased Services: Could you please provide some information here about the types of services that fall in to this line item, and could you please provide an explanation of the variance in last year's budget and revised numbers?

S. STOODLEY: Sure.

Purchased Services, the increase is due to scheduled increase with UNISYS, and UNISYS is a third party provider for personal property security registries, as well as higher Moneris fees because of our online volumes.

In terms of the money that we spent this past year, it is \$43,000 higher because of the additional Moneris fees and because of all the

online transactions. Again, we are looking at: Can we change our Moneris contract? Is there another vendor we can look at? We just can't be beholden to their fee increases.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

CHAIR: Okay.

We are now going to take a five-minute break to stretch and we'll come back to Mr. Dinn.

Recess

CHAIR: We're good.

Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Some of the questions have already been answered. Just to make sure, we have three residential tenancy adjudicators at this point in time, just to confirm, this year they have a caseload of 300 between them, would that be correct?

S. STOODLEY: We have three positions, two are filled, one has not been filled for a while, but Scott mentioned we have approval to make an offer to a third.

Scott, if you want to confirm the numbers for this year.

S. JONES: Yeah, the 300 that's in aggregate. That's not for each.

J. DINN: No, no I understood that. That's 300 in aggregate, then so roughly it would be about 100, if you get the third person, 100 per adjudicator, correct?

S. JONES: Yes, on average, yeah.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Under 2.1.03, Pensions Benefit Standards: Have the changes under Bill 54, 2020, to allow people to withdraw funds from their locked-in retirement funds been implemented and can the minister provide the number of plan holders who withdrew funds from their locked-in retirement funds?

S. STOODLEY: We did implement the changes as of, I believe, March 1, I think was the effective date. I believe the reporting requirements are every six months so they don't yet have to inform us but six months after that they do have to tell us how many of their members withdrew pensions.

I've received a lot of communications from people during that process. We're not aware of anyone who wanted to take money out who wasn't able to.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Under section 2.1.03, Salaries: What's the reason for the \$21,000 overspending last year? I'm assuming it's probably COVID and the 27th pay period and so on and so forth.

S. STOODLEY: The 27th pay period and additional funding for the 2 per cent increase.

J. DINN: Under 2.1.04, Commercial Registrations, the reason for the \$77,000 savings last year, same thing?

S. STOODLEY: For Salaries?

J. DINN: Yes.

S. STOODLEY: Yes. Then for the actuals – part of this includes the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation and their salaries. We did have some vacancies during the year. The Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation essentially pays us back for their salary costs, but they show up in the Estimates here.

J. DINN: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: They had sent us Q4 salary costs.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I just want to go back to something you talked about, the fees paid to Unisys and Moneris. I'm old enough to remember when instant tellers first came in, there was no fee for using them. I think it was a cheap way, like drugs, to hook you into it and you can't back off. Now, they charge fees. I would say now there are fees charged if

you have a balance that you don't use, if you make – it's sucking the life out of it.

Here's my question: I'm assuming the cost benefit analysis, this is cheaper to the department. Are there savings or are they being eaten up in fees?

S. STOODLEY: I don't know that we have the detailed breakdown, but I guess the Moneris fees – to your point, absolutely. The fees that we pay, the extra fees to have someone do something online, is certainly more efficient than having someone sit down and spend 15 minutes doing a transaction with you in person, absolutely. My point is we should be looking at reducing that cost, no matter what it is.

Now that we have, essentially over the last two years, changed the mix of how we process financial transactions with residents, you know, two years ago it would look very different than what it looks like today in terms of processing online. I just want to make sure the contract that we have for that – now, it's not with our department, it's with Finance, but I've been lobbying to make sure that contract is fit for purpose for our current mix of how we work with residents and how we process transactions and make sure that we can't be getting more value for money there.

J. DINN: Okay.

Under 2.2.01, Vital Statistics Registry, Salaries: What was the reason for the \$68,000 increase in Salaries last year and why is the estimate for this year reduced by \$130,000?

S. STOODLEY: 2.2.01, Vital Statistics Registry, Salaries, the 27th pay period and then – so we had lower salary steps for incumbents and then that was offset by retirement and then the – sorry, that's kind of the upcoming. We anticipate a retirement and then this past year we paid out for two retirements to offset by replacement incumbents at lower steps and then one vacancy.

J. DINN: I'm sorry, you paid out retirements, two retirements?

S. STOODLEY: Yes.

J. DINN: And that was offset by ...?

S. STOODLEY: One vacancy and then we rehired people, obviously, at a lower step.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Purchased Services under that same section: Why was the estimate for this year decreased by \$78,000? Is that to do with the death notification project winding down?

S. STOODLEY: Yes. The decrease of \$78,000 is the death registration project, including \$80,000 for current costs related to that project.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 2.2.03, Printing and Micrographic Services, Salaries, the \$45,000 savings last year, anything different from the 27th pay period and the step progressions?

S. STOODLEY: The upcoming amount we need is the same, you know, the elimination of the 27th pay period, plus the wage increase. This past year the reduction was related to two vacancies in the division, offset by the salary increases.

J. DINN: Are the vacancies to do with attrition then? I've noticed throughout just about every Estimates Committee, when I look at them in total, there is a significant number of vacancies. I'm just wondering the impact on the department's ability to do the work. We talked about motor vehicle registration; that's front line.

Holy Heart – I used this last night – had three secretaries when I first went there. A couple of years after, it went to two. I guess you might say, well, we're more efficient, but it did mean that when it came to copying exams that the secretaries would've done, that now fell to the teachers. So the workload was increased and meant that other things weren't being done as well.

So I'm just wondering here with the vacancies – and if the numbers in staffing are lower, is it making it difficult for staff to turn their attention to getting the hires that they need, the vacancies filled? That's where I'm looking at it. If indeed

we're looking at attrition and not replacing, it has to have an effect on the ability to fill the vacancies because that means you have to turn your attention away from other work to try and get these filled.

S. STOODLEY: Sean, I don't know if you want to ...

S. DUTTON: We talked at some length about this last evening. I think where the explanation is around less spending than anticipated due to vacancies, which is typically because there's a process undertaken for recruitment. There's a commitment to follow a merit-based process. In some areas, I guess printing and micrographics as an example, we wouldn't just hire anyone off the street to operate the printing equipment. They'd have to have training and expertise.

They don't necessarily come out of the woodwork right off the bat. They'll require a posting of the ad, a screening, a competition. If it's a unionized position, there also has to be a secondary evaluation that takes seniority into account. There is a process that we have to go through to ensure that the merit-based process is followed. And there can be other delays for other reasons: difficulty scheduling interviews; somebody is sick that day; someone grieves the review that screened them out or the result of the board. So there are a number of factors that can weigh into that over the course of the year.

The mitigation is to hire temporary assistants, where you can. We do have a lot more of administrative-type positions in the department, particularly in areas like commercial registrations and motor registration, where you'd have a lot of people working as, they would call it, a word-processing equipment operator or a clerk. There might be a greater abundance of people available with those types of skills.

A lot of times, we'll look at hiring a temporary person, without a competition, on a short-term basis while you concurrently run a competition to fill the job on a long-term basis. You also have people departing sometimes due to illness and you're not certain when they're coming back, so that may stall your ability to hire a replacement until you have some certainty on when that person might be able to return to the workplace.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. O'Driscoll.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We all know the issue with the price of lumber. Is there any department monitoring that?

S. STOODLEY: The question was around the price of lumber. In our department, we are responsible for – when you say price gouging, the wording in the legislation is really around unconscionable acts. There's no specific prescription around, like, if the cost of goods is too high. I mean, pragmatically, in terms of prosecuting and actioning price gouging or pricing unconscionably, we look at: Are two things being sold and one is being sold at an exorbitant cost?

I don't know, Scott, if you wanted to add anything to that. In terms of just generally the price of lumber being high, based on the current legislation, that would not trigger any action by our department, but we do receive complaints. It's complaint-driven, so we do welcome complaints around that.

S. JONES: Like the minister said, the legislation wouldn't specifically target a product like monitoring lumber. It's about business practices and, as the minister, mentioned unconscionable business practices. Lumber, in particular, is industry-driven. So the business trade practices act tends to focus on price anomalies or exceptions that would indicate excessive pricing. Then, of course, it would be subject to the individual, the consumer, to make a complaint to the Consumer Affairs division. Then Consumer Affairs would investigate the complaint to determine if it's excessive pricing. Part of the criteria that would be looked at, as I mentioned, is industry pricing; also pricing within a particular region may differ, so that's taken into consideration as well.

Just to give you an idea, in '20-'21 during COVID the Consumer Affairs office received 774 complaints, only 45 were related to general pricing and then even fewer, 15, were in relation to what would be considered price gouging and

there was no evidence of price gouging in those cases.

L. O'DRISCOLL: All right, thank you.

I'm sure the price of lumber – we all think they're unconscionable, no doubt about it.

Charitable lotteries, I believe they were suspended for a while during Level 5. Have they resumed and does the minister have a sense of how many non-profits that were impacted?

S. STOODLEY: We are issuing lottery licences in accordance with the Public Health guidelines. If you look at Public Health there are worksheets, I believe, for how do you do bingos safely and all that kind of stuff. So our very small lotteries team do work with Public Health and with charitable organizations to ensure that we issue lottery permits in accordance – making sure that organizations are following Public Health guidelines.

I'm not sure off the top of my head how many organizations were impacted during COVID. Scott, I don't know if you know any of them.

S. JONES: I don't have the numbers with me right now. But every organization was impacted at a varying degree because to be able to issue licences was due to the Public Health guidelines type thing around COVID. But we have, as the minister has said, been working closely with Public Health as we brought the licensing back so that non-profit organizations can facilitate their events.

S. STOODLEY: I just want to add we've been in step with the Public Health guidelines, so I'm not aware of any time where our lottery were more stringent. So when people couldn't gather, obviously you can't gather and have a fundraiser. The Public Health guidelines have been specifically around bingo, for example, and so when they're not allowed we would not issue a lottery licence to allow in-person bingo. They've been the keeper of the rules and then we follow with what we allow, essentially, in terms of lottery.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Online lotteries, like people on Facebook that are running a lottery, sometimes they're individuals and not organizations; is that allowed and regulated?

S. STOODLEY: No. Well, we regulate lotteries. There are very complex, I guess, rules in terms of what is and isn't allowed. If someone just has a contest on Facebook – well, I guess we regulate charitable lotteries specifically. Other lotteries like Atlantic Lottery Corporation and for profit, that would be through the Minister of Finance.

We do allow certain ones, for example, Easter Seals have a website where you can buy tickets for their home lottery. We work with them to follow the rules. There are certain things, for example, you can't do online like selection of a winner. That has to be kind of a paper process at the moment, but something on Facebook is probably not allowed.

L. O'DRISCOLL: No. Thank you.

Just go back to 2.2.01 under Revenue - Federal.

S. STOODLEY: Okay.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Could you please outline under what agreement or program this federal revenue comes from and could you explain or provide an explanation for the less than anticipated revenue last year?

S. STOODLEY: Sure.

This past year we had a decrease. We did some rightsizing of the budget. It also included a one-time increase for the death registration project; the federal government paid for that project. Then for the upcoming year, the decrease reflects \$80,000 of deferred revenue that was received and receipted in 2019-20, offset by an additional \$27,400 in federal revenue received for the provision of information around births and deaths.

L. O'DRISCOLL: The same thing under Revenue - Provincial, could you provide an explanation for the less than anticipated revenue there as well?

S. STOODLEY: That's lower than anticipated revenues related to secure shipment of birth certificates to individuals. We do that on a cost-recovery basis. If someone orders a birth certificate to be rushed, we charge them whatever that costs us. We don't make money on that, but we had fewer requests for that. The revenue line would come in there.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Is there counter service for things like marriage licensing, birth and death certificates reopened now?

S. STOODLEY: Most of that is done online. There's nothing like that closed at the moment for COVID or anything.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Because we're aware during a period of time counter service was closed, but a couple who were looking for a marriage licence were able to visit a marriage commissioner in their homes. Explain that decision? I would assume that counter service was appropriate with Plexiglas and cleaning would be safer than visiting a person's home to get a –

S. STOODLEY: Scott, if you want to ...

S. JONES: Marriage licences can be obtained through the Vital Statistics office, but we issue licences that allow private individuals marriage certificate issuers. I assume the choice for this particular couple that you may be referring to, they chose to go to this private as opposed to going through the Vital Statistics approach, which you submit online. We would then, if you were in the St. John's or Mount Pearl area, set an appointment for you to come in to pick up your licence. If you're outside, then we facilitate a way to get that licence to you.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Under 2.2.02, Queen's Printer, under Revenue - Provincial, could you please provide an explanation for less than anticipated revenue this year?

S. STOODLEY: Yes.

The decrease of \$61,000 between our budgeted and projected is reduction of revenues because more people are doing things online. We've seen university libraries around the country who used to buy copies of our legislation, they're not buying as many copies of our legislation anymore. They are buying fewer books that we are printing.

L. O'DRISCOLL: That's it for me on this section.

CHAIR: Thank you.

J. DINN: (Inaudible) on this section as well, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Okay, Clerk.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive, Regulatory Affairs.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Contra-minded?

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 carried.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.4.02 inclusive, Digital Government and Services.

CHAIR: Mr. O'Driscoll.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under this division under Salaries, 3.1.01, could you provide a breakdown of the number of employees in this division by region?

S. STOODLEY: Sure. I don't if Bonnie – do you have that?

B. STEELE: Avalon region has 41 staff: 39 are permanent, two temporaries. We have 41 positions filled at this time. Eastern region has a total of 18 staff: permanent 14, one seasonal, two temporary; Central has a total of 27 staff: 25 permanent, seasonal is one; Opening Doors is

one; Western has a total of 27 staff with 24 of those permanent, three temporary; and Labrador has a total of six staff has five permanent positions and one temporary.

L. O'DRISCOLL: All right, thank you.

Under Salaries there's a substantial savings in this line item from '20-'21, \$439,100 was saved in Salaries. Can you explain that?

S. STOODLEY: That reflects four highway enforcement officers, the manager of traffic safety, a few other short-term vacancies offset by three retirement payouts and then salary increases.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Under Purchased Services: Can you please provide a breakdown of the services purchased and the amount spent on each? Additionally, why did this line item go over budget by \$309,700?

S. STOODLEY: It went up because of Moneris costs, because of a higher volume of debit and credit transactions in the Motor Registration offices.

I don't know, Bonnie, if you have a list of the breakdown of all those – sorry, I have some here. That includes office rental costs, printing of forms, inspector books, copier charges, (inaudible) services, shredding services, storage costs, scale calibrations and equipment repairs, costs related to the photo driver licensing system and then we also provided \$5,000 to SafetyNL for motorcycle safety training.

L. O'DRISCOLL: All right, thank you so much.

Under Grants and Subsidies: Can you provide a breakdown of how and where these grants are award?

S. STOODLEY: Of course.

This is the only grant, I think, within our department, but we give a \$10,000 grant for SafetyNL for a Lids for Kids program. We also pay Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance fees, Canadian Council of Motor Transport

Administrators fees, International Registration Plan membership fees and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators fees.

L. O'DRISCOLL: All right, thank you.

Under Revenue - Federal: Can you please outline under what agreement or program this federal revenue comes from?

S. STOODLEY: We received federal revenue for our insurance validation project. That's what we talked about in terms of insurance companies notifying us when someone has cancelled their insurance and that will notify the Motor Registration Division. So that's kind of a new technology solution that's almost ready.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, good.

Under Revenue - Provincial: Can you please provide an explanation for the less than anticipated revenue from last year?

S. STOODLEY: The decrease in \$16,600 reflects fewer requests for expedited driver's licence delivery services. If I had to guess, people are travelling less often and don't realize they need to renew their driver's licence and don't need expedited services of their driver's licence.

L. O'DRISCOLL: You've probably touched on this a little bit as you go along, but provide an update on the counter service and how service delivery has been impacted by COVID. Is there a backlog in any of the services? I know we touched on some of them, but just in general, I guess.

S. STOODLEY: For COVID, obviously, it was hugely impacted. I've already talked about a lot of that. We also had to reduce the number of counter spaces that we had for social distancing and all that. I think it was only recently we were back up to 10 counter spaces in Mount Pearl being open. Some of our more rural areas would not have seen any negative impact and still aren't. At seven of 11 of our government services offices, you can get an appointment within that week for counter service. It's just kind of in the Mount Pearl and Corner Brook and our bigger locations that we do

unfortunately now, during high season, have a bit more of a delay.

Again, I think some of that is just because we are new to essentially running a contact centre, whereas before it was all appointment-driven. We're using technology; we have the data. We're trying to make incremental changes to test to see how we can be more efficient. It's kind of a culture change, really, within the department. Also, kind of as a pilot project to get ready for next summer, we are hoping to pilot some new technologies; for example, making email more efficient, because we get a lot of emails to the MRD email account. We are looking at are there any email-ticketing tools we can use to make that more efficient for staff rather than managing it in Outlook, for example.

It is a priority for me personally, using my former life background of doing this all the time, to try to make that experience, I guess – really, it's kind of managing a contact centre, which we are trying to improve. We're working on it.

L. O'DRISCOLL: The counter service in – I'm going to use Mount Pearl, because that's the busiest one obviously. Is it fully opened now? Is it fully back to all stalls being open that you can go in and get counter service?

S. STOODLEY: It is, yes. It's fully opened. I think in the last week it's been fully opened.

L. O'DRISCOLL: They go by appointment, you're saying.

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Not to use *Open Line*, but I heard one guy on *Open Line* saying he went in – I hate using *Open Line* – and he had one vehicle to register and when he decided to go, he had two. They wouldn't register the second one for him. I'm sure you probably get that. That could be just the person that they're dealing with that day, I'm sure. I'm sure that with making an appointment, if they have two or three, they could take care of it. Just something that I heard. I don't know if it actually happened.

S. STOODLEY: Personally, I would expect that you wouldn't send someone away to make

another appointment to come back for a second thing.

Gail, I don't know if you wanted to speak to that.

G. BOLAND: Yes, absolutely. We accommodate and we even have people who show up without an appointment or who have travelled a long distance and we accommodate to the best of our ability, absolutely. In Mount Pearl alone, we have 245 appointments a day.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I would think so, too, but when you hear that it's a one-off and I'm sure – I heard it and I said I'd just throw it out there.

G. BOLAND: Of course.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Under section 3.2.01, Support Services, Salaries, there's a substantial salary overage of \$165,500 in this line item for 2021. Can you explain that?

S. STOODLEY: There was a retirement payout and then salary increases as well, offset by vacancies.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay, thank you.

Under Purchased Services, could you explain or please outline what services are purchased and please explain what accounts for the variance across the line item.

S. STOODLEY: In terms of Purchased Services, this includes printing, advertising, vehicle rentals, equipment rentals and general purchased services for the division. The decrease, I guess, for this past year, we had lower charges for secure cash services and copier charges. Then, the amount that we're asking for, there's a decrease there because of a reduction for secure cash pickups, offset by an increase in Moneris fees and copier charges. Then, what we pay for code books has been reprofiled to Supplies.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I keep hearing Moneris fees. How much would you pay in a year in every department? What would that cost you?

S. STOODLEY: I don't know if we know for our department.

B. STEELE: I don't have the exact dollar value, but it's almost \$500,000.

L. O'DRISCOLL: It's something I guess that you're looking at to try to get around, obviously.

S. STOODLEY: Absolutely.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Under Revenue - Provincial, how is this revenue generated? Could you please provide an explanation for the less-than-anticipated revenue of last year? I'm thinking COVID, but maybe not.

S. STOODLEY: We do get revenues from fees: building accessibility planned reviews; fire and life safety planned reviews; designed reviews like boiler and pressure vessel system, fittings and procedures when we issue propane gas and medical gas installer certificates; testing of pressure welders and braziers and the procedures around that – our department does a whole bunch of stuff – approval of sewage treatment systems over 4,500 litres per day; permits to alter or install pressure systems; design reviews; registration and inspector – so registration for elevator inspectors and amusement ride installers.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, my colleague asked a question that I was just about to ask with the Moneris fees, \$500,000. That's just for all the sections in your department? I'm assuming that other departments that use it are also paying these fees. A significant cost.

S. STOODLEY: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: Okay.

How many highway enforcement officers are currently employed by the department? Did you answer that in terms of, I think, weigh stations or ...?

S. STOODLEY: I'll hand that over to Gail.

G. BOLAND: Yes, we have 32 highway enforcement officers currently employed across the province, a couple of vacancies that we are working through right now.

J. DINN: Where would they be located? Are they throughout the province? I guess on the Avalon there might be more of them.

G. BOLAND: Well, we have a few in Corner Brook, Foxtrap. Are you talking about the vacancies or –?

J. DINN: No, no, just the total and where they're currently allocated.

G. BOLAND: Oh, just the total? Yeah, sure.

We have one HEO right now in Corner Brook. We have four in Foxtrap. We have six in Grand Falls. We have six in Goobies. We have in one in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, one in Labrador City. We have six in Mount Pearl. We have four in Port aux Basques and we have four in Pynn's Brook.

J. DINN: Sorry, in where? The last one?

G. BOLAND: Pynn's Brook.

J. DINN: Pynn's Brook?

G. BOLAND: Yes.

J. DINN: Thank you.

G. BOLAND: I'm not sure if that adds up to 32.

J. DINN: No, that's good.

If I could move on to 3.2.01, Property, Furnishings and Equipment. The overage of \$35,000, what was the reason for that?

S. STOODLEY: This past year we bought essentially as many laptops as we could afford for work from home related to COVID-19. So that's \$34,800 for laptops.

J. DINN: Thank you.

3.2.02, Regional Services, Salaries: What's the reason for the \$275,000 savings last year? I'm

assuming a vacancy is part of it. Why has the Estimate for this year decreased by \$108,000?

S. STOODLEY: The actual amount decrease was due to salary savings because of vacancies throughout the province and delays in recruitment processes. Then in terms of the Salaries moving forward, the decrease is a result of the elimination of the funding for the 27th pay period, then offset by wage increases.

J. DINN: And for this year? Is this just a continuation of vacancies –

S. STOODLEY: Yeah.

J. DINN: – or have you decided that there are people now, through attrition, eliminated?

S. STOODLEY: I believe it's just because of the pay period, offset by the wage increase.

J. DINN: Okay, that's for this year then?

S. STOODLEY: Yeah.

J. DINN: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: So last year it was vacancies and delays in recruitment.

J. DINN: Okay.

Property, Furnishings and Equipment: What's the reason for the \$13,000 overrun last year?

S. STOODLEY: So \$13,000 was the cost of Plexiglas in front counters in our regional offices due to COVID-19. That was a requirement to reopen for the Public Health guidelines and to protect our staff.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Revenue - Provincial: What is the reason for the roughly \$1.4 million in reduced revenue? Why is this estimate of revenue down by \$430,000 this year?

S. STOODLEY: The decrease in revenue is primarily due to the offices being closed for counter service as a result of COVID-19. Obviously, when we were closed we didn't process fees, then higher than anticipated online

electrical permits of just over \$900,000. That goes in the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

Then moving forward, the decrease in revenue is we've reprofiled online electrical permit revenue to Current account revenue.

J. DINN: Thank you.

3.2.03, Collection Services: Again, the reason for the increased estimate of \$31,000 this year?

S. STOODLEY: That's the salary plan and approved salary increases.

I also just want to add that collections only recently came into our department a few months ago. It moved from Finance to our department. So it's a new part of our department.

J. DINN: Okay. For the collections?

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

J. DINN: Okay.

Under 3.3.01, Occupational Health and Safety Inspections, Salaries: What is the reason for the \$800,000 in savings last year?

S. STOODLEY: We had short-term vacancies, essentially. Three occupational health and safety officers, three industrial hygienists and an occupational health and safety regional manager, all had vacancies offset by salary increases. We found it particularly difficult to fill a hygienist position and delays in recruitment led to the variance.

J. DINN: Purchased Services: The reason for \$67,000 in savings last year.

S. STOODLEY: We had fewer room rentals for investigations, you know, taking statements in rural areas. We cost-share an occupational health and safety regulation working group and geotechnical engineers underground mining review fees, we had a delay in, I guess, incurring some of those costs. We had radiology services costs, shredding and recycling costs.

J. DINN: Okay.

3.4.01, Assistance to St. Lawrence Miners' Dependents: How many people are currently receiving assistance through this program? There were 43, I think, last year.

S. STOODLEY: Forty this year.

J. DINN: Forty this year.

S. STOODLEY: Yeah.

J. DINN: Thank you.

3.4.02, Assistance to Outside Agencies: Why were no grants awarded last year? Because of COVID?

S. STOODLEY: The decrease in \$8,000 is no requirement for conference sponsorships during the year.

J. DINN: Thank you.

The provincial revenue: What was the source of the extra \$6,000 in revenue?

S. STOODLEY: That is related to a timing difference where we get reimbursed for WorkplaceNL. The last quarter of 2019-2020 costs were not reimbursed until the first quarter of this year.

J. DINN: Mr. Chair, that's all I have at this point, thank you, on that section.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr. O'Driscoll.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I just have a couple of questions.

Back to 3.3.01, under Purchased Services.

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, 3.3 ...?

L. O'DRISCOLL: 3.3.01.

S. STOODLEY: Apologies, sorry.

L. O'DRISCOLL: That's all right.

S. STOODLEY: Okay.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Under Purchased Services: Could you please detail what services are included here and what explains last year's savings?

S. STOODLEY: Sure.

I think we touched on it already. Purchased Services here is – we look at occupational health and safety regulation, and we had delays in national cost sharing around that working group; we had the geotechnical engineers' underground mining review; we had a lower than anticipated cost for the radiology services, shredding and recycling services; and then we didn't need to rent as many rooms for investigations and taking statements in rural areas where we don't have government offices.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I'm not sure if this one was asked or not, and this is my last one.

Revenue - Provincial: How is the revenue generated, and could you please provide an explanation for the less than anticipated revenue last year?

S. STOODLEY: Sure.

Under Occupational Health and Safety, WorkplaceNL essentially reimbursed us all these costs. Ultimately, they're incurred by employers when they pay WorkplaceNL costs. So we spend the money and then WorkplaceNL pays us back. They're 100 per cent recoverable from WorkplaceNL. The revenue, essentially, reflects the reduction in salaries and, I guess, just exactly what our costs were, they reimbursed.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Okay.

Again, I'd like to thank everybody for coming. That's my last question in this. I'd just like to thank everybody. I know what it's like when we are asked a question in our section, just as an MHA, and you say: Well, I'll get back to you. But to have all these answers here pretty quick is pretty impressive and so I'd like to thank you all for that.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. O'Driscoll.

Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Again, thank you very much for your answers. Thank you for appearing today. I think it has to be one of the shorter Estimates meetings. It's good to be the lint trap.

CHAIR: Clerk.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.4.02 inclusive, Digital Government and Service NL.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.4.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.4.02 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, Department of Digital Government and Service NL, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Digital Government and Service NL?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Contra-minded, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Digital Government and Service NL carried without amendment.

CHAIR: I'd like to thank you all for being here today. Thank you to the substitutes that came as well, I appreciate that.

I'm going to ask for a mover to adjourn.

B. WARR: So moved.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Warr.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Enjoy the rest of your day in the House, Members, and everybody else in your workplace.

Thank you.

On motion, the Committee adjourned *sine die*.