



Overviews

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Clerk's review

2010–11 was a significant year for the House of Representatives. The House was dissolved for a general election on 19 July 2010, bringing the Forty-second Parliament to an end. Staff working across the department contributed to the completion of tasks associated with the end of one parliament and preparation for the next, in a period of activity made more challenging by an unusually short lead time between the election on 21 August and the opening of the new parliament on 28 September.

The opening of the Forty-third Parliament was a highlight of 2010–11. Among other activities, the department organised the Indigenous 'welcome to country' ceremony on the opening day. While this was not the first time such a ceremony had taken place, it was the first time it occurred in accordance with a resolution of the Senate and the standing orders of the House as part of the normal arrangements for the opening of a new parliament.

The election had resulted in neither major party emerging with a majority in the House, and the negotiations that followed it led to the formation of a minority federal government, the first since 1940. These events and those that followed posed significant challenges for the department—and they were challenges the department welcomed.

The department's response to the challenges presented by minority government helped inform our thinking in developing our new corporate plan during the year. Our priorities during the period of the Corporate Plan 2010–13 are to:

- ▶ strengthen our culture of service to our clients
- ▶ work together to ensure our people have the capability to provide high-quality service and that the department is a good place to work

- ▶ ensure that our capability to effectively support our clients and the parliamentary institution continues
- ▶ strengthen our collaboration, both in Australia and internationally, with parliamentary colleagues, other public sector agencies and organisations committed to the development of parliamentary institutions.

Service

The department provided advice and assistance at all stages in the period following the election as the various possibilities emerged. The agreements negotiated before the formation of the minority government provided for reforms in important areas of House practice. These included the legislative process, committee operations and question time. Sitting hours were increased, with all of the additional time being allocated to private members' business.

The department welcomed the challenge of developing new procedures to support the introduction and operation of these reforms; several had been recommended by the Procedure Committee in the past, and we believe they have the potential to be sustained in the longer term.

The House re-established a Selection Committee in the Forty-third Parliament, with a broader role than its predecessors. Its role now encompasses the referral of bills to committees and the recommendation of items of private members' business to be voted on, as well as the programming of private members' business and committee and delegation business.

By 30 June the Selection Committee had referred 28 bills to house or joint committees, under new procedures introduced through changes to the standing orders. Support for the work of the Selection Committee and for committee inquiries into bills gave us opportunities for innovation and required the wider development and transfer of skills within the department. Members took advantage

of the increased opportunities to initiate items of business and of the commitment to bring matters on for decision. The demand for legislative drafting was such that it was necessary to appoint a consultant drafter:

The department has traditionally placed a high priority on its relationship with members and their staff. Historically, the department's role has been to advise, support and facilitate behind the scenes, and it has not had a high profile. The circumstances of minority government and the uncertainty attaching to many matters saw a significant increase in requests for advice, for example in respect of options for dealing with the business of the House.

Often multiple requests for advice were received from different members on the same matters. Some of these matters were of a highly technical nature, and some raised points that had not been issues in the past, yet members were required to make decisions about them. In some cases, to ensure that the practice of the House was explained as well and as consistently as possible, I published detailed procedural notes to members. At times the subjects were politically sensitive, and it was realised that, in any particular case, the substance of a note might be welcomed more by some members than others. I recognised that such actions contained some risk for the department. These actions were taken only because of the unusual circumstances and because of the demand from members as they were required to make decisions about possibilities that had not arisen before. We trust that our intentions in these matters were understood.

We are encouraged that feedback from the Speaker and other participants about our services was positive. The annual members' survey, which was conducted in May and June 2011, confirmed that the department continues to provide a high level of service. It was gratifying that, in a challenging year for departmental staff, there was an increase in the 'extremely satisfied' and 'highly satisfied' responses in most categories in the survey when compared with the corresponding results in 2010. Further details are in Appendix 12.

In terms of service to the community, during 2010–11 we continued to facilitate community engagement with the House by supporting the work of parliamentary committees. The department supported some high-profile inquiries during the year. These included the Standing Committee on Regional Australia's inquiry into the impact of the controversial Murray–Darling Basin Plan, and an inquiry by the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, which received more than 33,000 responses to an online survey of young Australians. Further details on committee activities are on pages 31–7.

During the year we were able to expand our outreach activities at a time of increased interest in the work of the House of Representatives. For example:

- ▶ In February 2011 an 'About the House' Twitter news feed was introduced to highlight committee work and proceedings in the House of Representatives Chamber. By the end of 2010–11 the Twitter feed had attracted more than 2,500 followers.
- ▶ A new television program, *MPI (Matters of Public Importance)*, providing highlights from each parliamentary sitting period, is now broadcast on Australia's Public Affairs Channel, A-PAC, with replays available on the Parliament of Australia website.
- ▶ The department contributed to the organisation of Parliament House Open Day in September 2010, with our display focusing on committee work.
- ▶ To help engage young Australians with the House of Representatives, the department, in association with the Parliamentary Education Office, organised the 'My First Speech' competition. The competition was open to students in years 10 to 12 from around Australia, inviting them to write and record a speech as if it were their first as a member of the House of Representatives.

More information on these initiatives and other community outreach activities is at pages 26–30.

People

While the department believed it had a good knowledge base in all areas, the new arrangements required more staff members to support bills inquiries; support for new committees and extended sitting hours; advice about new possibilities in the working of the House and its committees; and subsequent extensive amendment to the written procedural guidance produced by the department. These outcomes were achieved with staff numbers remaining stable; the department had 158 staff at the end of 2010–11, the same figure as at 30 June 2010.

It was very pleasing, although not surprising, to see the enthusiastic and professional manner in which departmental staff members responded to the considerable challenges of the Forty-third Parliament.

The sharing of knowledge and experience has never been more important than it was in 2010–11 and, in my view, has never been done with more goodwill and success.

One of the main management tools in the department is the annual staff survey. The various indexes derived from the survey remained broadly comparable with last year's results. In particular, it was pleasing that the leadership satisfaction index from the survey, which measures leadership at all levels of the department, remains at more than 80 per cent. Further details on the survey are at pages 55–6.

The department held its annual planning day in May 2011. As in past years, I was grateful to staff from all areas and at all levels for their willingness to contribute their views at the planning day. The discussions were guided by our practical experience of the challenges and opportunities presented by minority government.

The department continued to support a comprehensive training program in 2010–11, reflecting our status as an organisation that complies with the Investors in People standard. In particular, the department supported extensive development of knowledge and skills in the application of

parliamentary law, practice and procedure through a range of specialist training programs, 'shadowing' opportunities and in-house seminars and debriefs designed to share experiences.

Capability

In our report for 2009–10 we drew attention to the ever-increasing pressure on the department's budget and to steps that had been taken, with the Speaker's support, to achieve savings. The reform agreements provided for the establishment of an Appropriations and Administration Committee to consider, among other things, estimates for the funding required for the department's operations. The committee, which is chaired by the Speaker, supported a proposal for supplementation of the department's funding to enable it to meet additional costs incurred as a result of the new arrangements. It is most pleasing to report that this proposal met with some success.

The establishment of the Appropriations and Administration Committee is significant. It means that, for the first time, a formal and representative group of members, led by the Speaker, will be able to consider the funding needs of the department on a regular basis and make representations as it judges necessary.

The reform agreements had also endorsed an earlier recommendation by the House of Representative Standing Committee on Procedure that an external review be conducted of staffing levels within the department's Committee Office. A consultant was subsequently engaged to undertake the review. The consultant's report, presented to the department in March 2011, made the following recommendations:

- ▶ that a model where one secretariat work group supports two committees be the standard (in the Forty-second Parliament most secretariats had supported three committees)
- ▶ that an additional secretariat be established to allow this model to be implemented fully

- ▶ that additional resources be provided in 2011–12 to support the increase in bills inquiries by House committees, with the level of resourcing to then be reviewed
- ▶ that a specific budget allocation be established to allow committees to procure external expert advice to support the committee inquiry process.

The department was able to implement the first two of these recommendations, having secured additional funding in the 2011–12 Budget. Implementation of the final two recommendations will depend on the department receiving supplementary funding.

While the additional funding received in the 2011–12 Budget was welcome, the department's financial position remains tight. We anticipate an increase in activity in 2011–12, as is customary in the middle year of an election cycle, and greater pressure on our budget as a result.

We continue to seek efficiencies in response to these pressures. For example, during 2010–11 we progressed work on a number of information and communications technology improvements, including an ongoing transfer to electronic record keeping; development of a significantly improved departmental intranet to be launched in late 2011; and more efficient HTML publishing of, in particular, committee

reports (using a software program provided by the Department of the Senate). We also entered into an arrangement with a travel services provider, consistent with whole-of-government reforms intended to drive efficiencies in procurement across the public sector.

Collaboration

The department places a high priority on its relationship with the staff of other parliamentary departments, and others who deal with or support the House and its committees.

We collaborated with our colleagues in the other departments to support major events in the parliamentary calendar, such as the opening day for the Forty-third Parliament, the Parliament House Open Day referred to earlier, and the address on 20 June 2011 by the Right Honourable John Key—the first address by a New Zealand Prime Minister to the Australian Parliament.

During 2010–11 we expanded our links with the other departments in the delivery of several important projects. For example, with the Department of the Senate we exchanged and trialled information and communications technology applications to automate the processing and distribution of parliamentary



Staff of the department's People Strategies Office receive a staff achievement award from the Clerk of the House, 29 November 2010.

committee documents. The departments also began work on an electronic repository for the Parliamentary Papers Series, a project to redevelop the chamber document production system and associated databases for both Houses, and a project to redevelop booking systems for school visits, chamber galleries and committee rooms. Considerable support was also provided, with the other parliamentary departments, for the ongoing redevelopment of the Parliament of Australia website.

In 2010–11 we finalised the implementation of a shared service agreement with the Department of Parliamentary Services, whereby the Department of the House of Representatives is now responsible for managing the Department of Parliamentary Services' payroll. We also contributed to infrastructure projects in the House of Representatives delivered by the Department of Parliamentary Services, such as redevelopment of security entries and relighting of the House of Representatives car park.

We continued to collaborate with external organisations. During 2010–11 we maintained our association with the Parliamentary Studies Centre at the Australian National University, in cooperation with colleagues from the Department of the Senate and the Parliamentary Library. We also undertook further work with the South Australian House of Assembly to redevelop the department's Procedural Records System.

I am pleased that in 2010–11 the department was able to secure funding from AusAID to support a three-year Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program to strengthen the parliaments of Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu. The program, which commenced in January 2011, is a joint initiative with the United Nations Development Programme and is also being supported by the parliaments of the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Victoria.

The department's International and Community Relations Office, in partnership with interparliamentary relations staff from the New Zealand Parliament, coordinated a meeting of Pacific parliaments in New Zealand in August 2010. An important outcome from the meeting was the development of a Pacific Parliaments Network, linking parliaments in the Pacific region through a website (launched in February 2011) that provides a calendar of events, access to research papers, and a facility for Pacific island parliaments to seek research assistance from the New Zealand and Australian parliamentary libraries.

Outlook

The uncertainty in the House that was evident in the first nine months of minority government is likely to continue in 2011–12. The significant legislative, scrutiny and representational work of the House will continue, as it must.

I am optimistic that the department will continue to play its part in supporting this work in a professional and expert manner. This confidence is based on its past performance, and especially its performance during 2010–11.

The provision of support services for the daily work of the House, its committees and members will again be an overriding responsibility. We will seek to ensure that the development and refinement of departmental systems, and the wider systems with which we are involved, continues and is not compromised by day-to-day demands. Completion of the redevelopment of the Parliament of Australia website will be a high priority. We will also continue to give a high priority to training and development, and to the sharing of experience, fortified by the belief that the priority given to these matters was critical to the success of the department in meeting the challenges of 2010–11.

Departmental overview

Purpose

The department's purpose, as set out in its corporate plan, is:

To support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body by providing advice and services of a high standard.

Role and functions

The *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* provides the legal framework for a nonpartisan Parliamentary Service to serve the Australian Parliament. The Act establishes this department and the other two parliamentary departments—the Department of the Senate and the Department of Parliamentary Services. It provides for the management, leadership and responsibilities of Parliamentary Service employees as well as the functions of the Parliamentary Service Commissioner and the Parliamentary Service Merit Protection Commissioner. The other parliamentary departments report separately to the parliament.

During 2010–11, the department continued its role as a service department for the parliament, supporting the work of the House of Representatives, including its members in their parliamentary work, its committees and some joint committees comprising members of both Houses. The department also maintained its focus on assistance to the House and the parliament in their relationships within Australia and internationally.

Organisational structure

The department is led by its Executive, comprising the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk Assistant (Committees), Clerk Assistant (Table) and Serjeant-at-Arms. The work of the department is carried out through eight offices. The department's organisational structure at 30 June 2011 is depicted in Figure 1. The only change to this structure during 2010–11 was the merger, with effect from 1 October 2010, of the former Parliamentary Relations Office and the Liaison and Projects Office to form the International and Community Relations Office.

Outcome and program structure

The department has one outcome:

Advisory and administrative services support the House of Representatives to fulfil its representative and legislative role.

The department has one program, containing the following five components:

▶ **Program component 1.1:
Chamber and Main Committee**

Departmental activities: *Resources supporting the effective operation of the Chamber and Main Committee of the House of Representatives.*

▶ **Program component 1.2:
Community awareness**

Departmental activities: *Resources supporting the provision of services to increase community understanding of, and interaction with, the work of the House of Representatives and the Commonwealth Parliament.*

Revenue from other sources (s. 31).

▶ **Program component 1.3:
Committee services**

Departmental activities: *Resources supporting the House of Representatives and some joint committees in fulfilling their role in the parliamentary consideration of policy and legislation and the scrutiny of government.*

▶ **Program component 1.4:
Interparliamentary relations**

Departmental activities: *Provision of advice and support to facilitate the conduct of the parliament's international and regional affairs.*

▶ **Program component 1.5:
Members' services**

Departmental activities: *Provision of advice, services and support to members in Parliament House.*

Payment of members' salaries and allowances.

Figure 2 shows the outcome and program structure of the department and Figure 3 shows the organisational contribution to the outcome.

Figure 1 Organisational structure at 30 June 2011

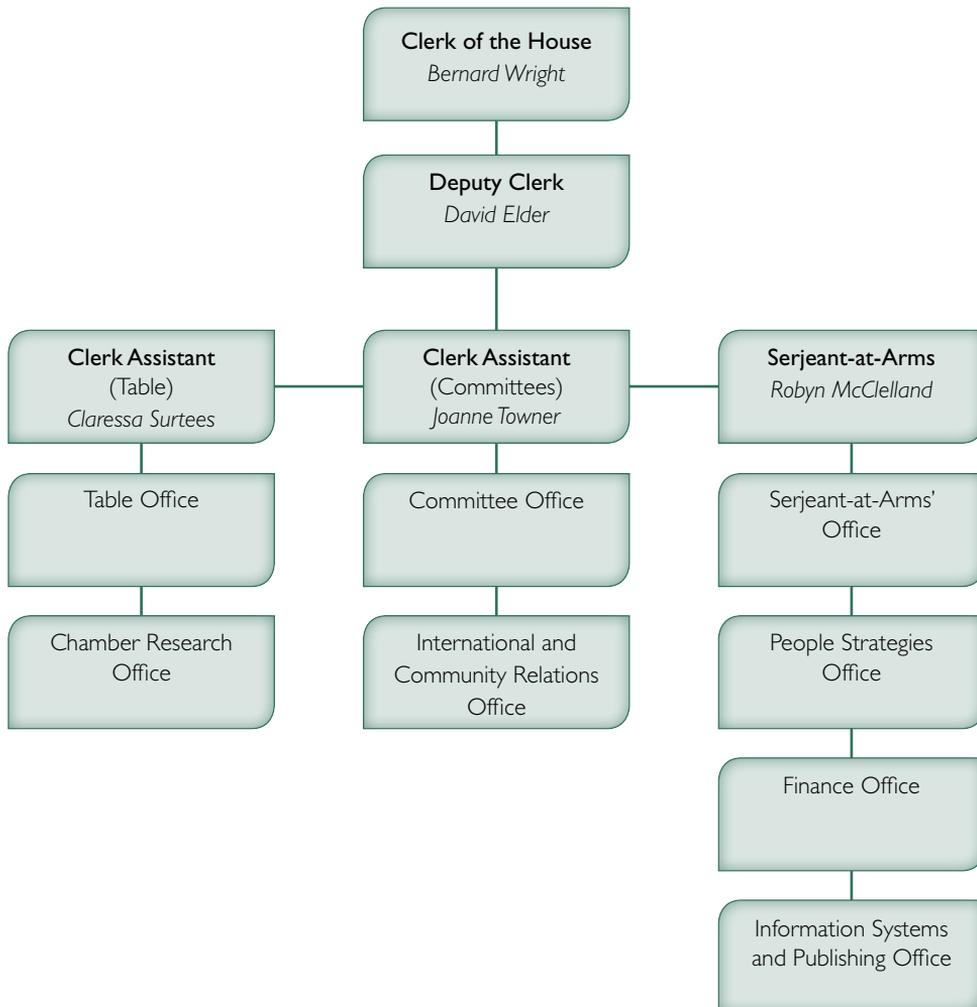


Figure 2 Outcome and program structure at 30 June 2011

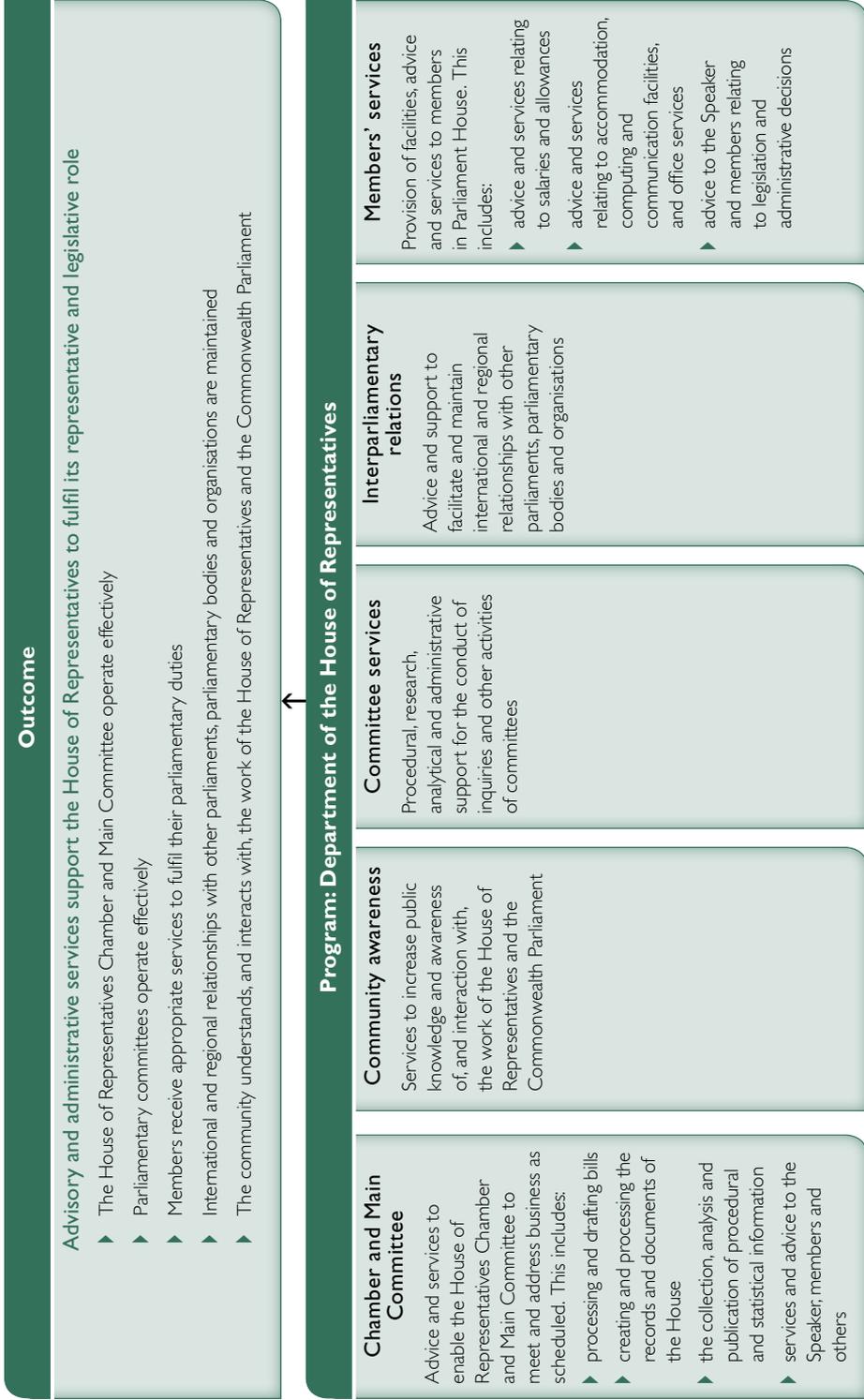
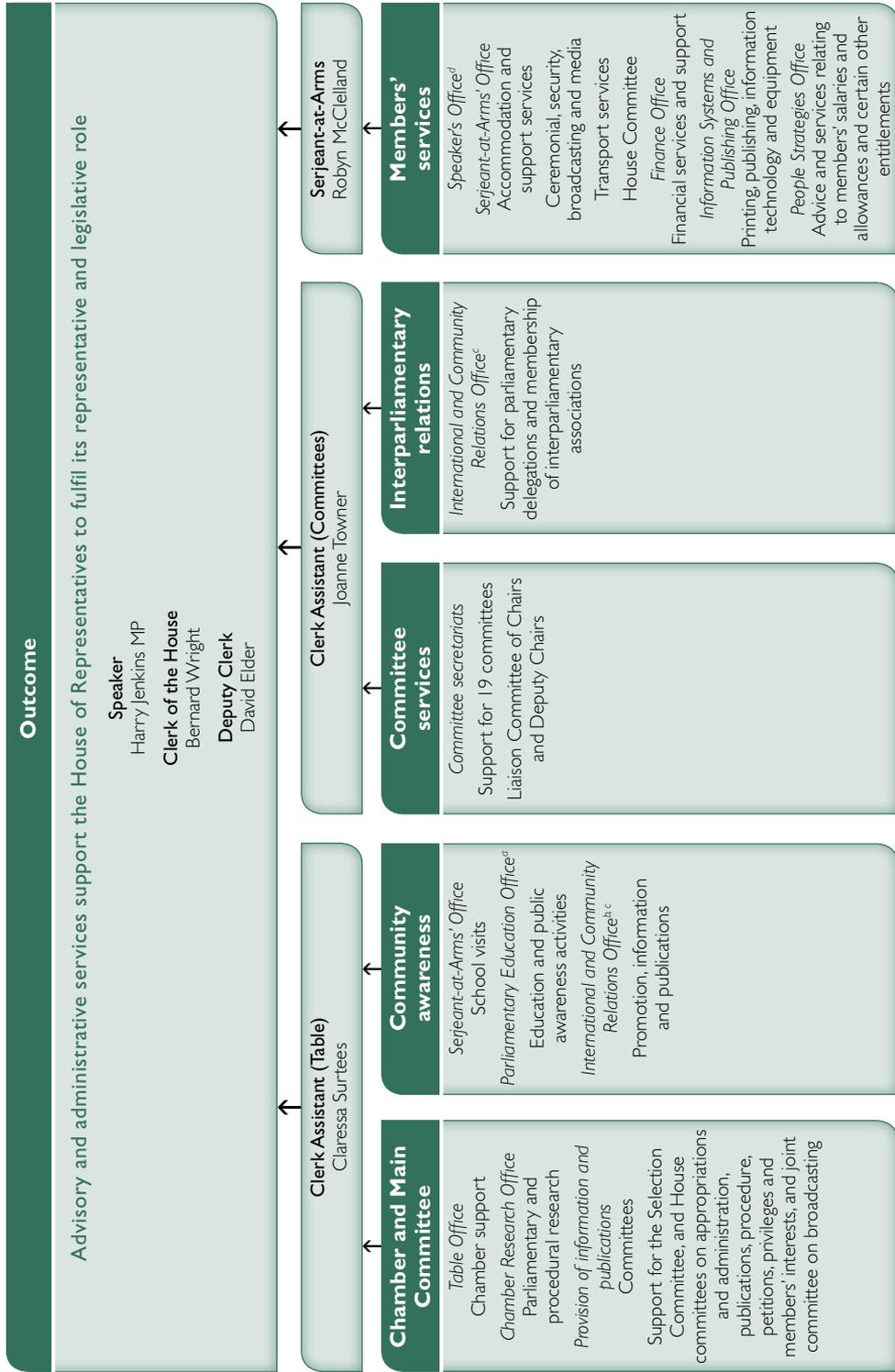


Figure 3 Organisational contribution to the outcome at 30 June 2011



a. Jointly funded by the departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and administered by the Department of the Senate.

b. The International and Community Relations Office reports to the Clerk Assistant (Committees).

c. Jointly funded by the departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and formed by the merger, on 1 October 2010, of the Parliamentary Relations Office and the Liaison and Projects Office.

d. Included in this program component for budgetary purposes.

Financial performance

The department ended the 2010–11 financial year with a surplus attributable to the Australian Government of \$651,000. This result reflects very low levels of normal activity for the first four months following the election with high levels of activity across all areas of the department for the remainder of the financial year. Through the 2010–11 Federal Budget the department was able to secure a small amount of funding to support the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety. The increase in the department’s own source income is attributed to revenue from the provision of payroll services to the Department of Parliamentary Services and other revenue from AusAID secured under the Pacific Public Sector Linkages Program.

The department’s balance sheet has continued to remain healthy, which is important as we enter the middle year of the parliamentary cycle, traditionally a year of increased activity and corresponding increases in expenditure. The department received capital funding of \$1.3 million and this is recorded in the financial statements as an equity injection.

The outlook for the coming financial years continues to be tight. Cost pressures resulting from additional resources required to support the extra sitting hours of the Chamber and Main Committee have been alleviated with the supplementation in funding received in the 2011–12 Federal Budget. Additional funding was also received to support the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network. While this funding is essential to enable the department to fulfil its outcome, the increase in the efficiency dividend to 1.5 per cent for 2011–12 and the following year will mean that the department will need to continue to adopt a conservative approach to the use of resources, while at the same time maintaining existing service levels. This will be particularly challenging as 2011–12, being the middle year of the Forty-third Parliament, will be one of high activity resulting in increasing costs in all offices.

Figure 4 provides a picture of the department’s financial performance over the five-year period since 2006–07.

Figure 4 Financial performance, 2006–07 to 2010–11

