

ST JOHN AMBULANCE — INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

842. Mr R.H. COOK to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the independent WA ambulance service inquiry and the minister's media statement yesterday in which he claimed that the St John Ambulance service would be able to employ 37 new staff immediately as a result of the cash injection of \$1.028 million.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that the public sector standard for the full cost of establishing a single full-time equivalent employee is a minimum of \$100 000?
- (2) Can the minister explain how he expects to fund 37 full-time employees on a permanent basis with an allocation of \$1 million?
- (3) When does the minister expect these additional staff to commence work?
- (4) Has the minister set out to mislead the public by giving the impression that he is providing a boost to St John's resources, when he knows that the scale of this problem demands a minimum injection of at least \$20 million?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

- (1)-(4) I cannot confirm that the figure of \$100 000 is exact, but I suspect that it is; that seems to be about the right amount. What the member is failing to take into account is the training time required for some of those positions. We did not make up those figures. All those times and numbers were given to us directly by St John Ambulance. I told St John that the government would work with Treasury to work out the total amount of money needed. I asked St John to give us an indicative figure of what amount it thought was needed to do that, and it has done that.

Mr R.H. Cook: Sixty million?

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is a large amount of money. That is the amount in four years' time; it certainly is not the immediate amount. That is St John's request based on its estimate. What do we do? We are not about to hand over that amount of money. I am sure that the former Treasurer would not have done that either. He would not have said, "We have St John Ambulance or the Royal Flying Doctor Service requesting X number of dollars. Okay, sure, here you are." There obviously has to be scrutiny. We have already set up a team with Greg Joyce, Dr Simon Towler and some financial experts to go through those figures and tease them out to see if that is exactly what is required. I said publicly that Greg Joyce will also look at the country system and how it works with the volunteer system. We will see whether we need to expand paramedic services in the country and we will look at other ways to make the service work better. They are going to do an evaluation of what is required to make that service a first-class service. Some of those positions—for example, the call centre operators—need three months' training. They will start in three months, as we were advised by St John. Some of the transport drivers can begin relatively quickly. I think it will take about four or five weeks to get the first tranche in place, which I think is 12 drivers, and the rest will start a month or two later. Again, that has been requested by St John. St John has told us what it needs to do urgently to address the issues that are presented in the report. We have responded directly to St John's request and have said that we will put in the money that it asked for straightaway and we will immediately start working out much extra will be needed.