

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

**730. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Local Government:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to work with local government to deliver better outcomes for ratepayers, small businesses and the wider community.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the proposed reforms to the local government sector announced today will address disputes and dysfunction within the local government sector?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how these reforms will also help cut red tape and improve transparency and accountability?

**Mr J.N. CAREY replied:**

- (1)–(2) I want to thank the member for Bicton. I am deeply proud that the McGowan government is introducing the most significant reforms to the Local Government Act in the last 25 years. It is only a Labor government that delivers true reform in this regard. We only have to remember the shocking and dismal performance of the previous coalition's shambolic forced amalgamations that failed to deliver anything to local communities except high costs and bills to ratepayers. We are undertaking a very pragmatic reform that deals with the heart of the critical issues that are facing local government. We are trying to create a better system of greater transparency and accountability to ratepayers. The key focus is dealing with dysfunction and toxic relationships in local government. We are creating a powerful watchdog with sweeping powers—an independent chief inspector who will be able to investigate, manage complaints and undertake real action. It will be backed in by a team of specialist monitors who will go in early when there are problems to deal with those issues. They may have expertise in financial matters, human resources, governance or mediation. We know that better tools are needed to intervene when local governments go wrong, because no-one wins from this. Small business does not win from this, our local economies do not win from this, staff in those organisations do not win from this and the local community does not win from this. These are signature and significant reforms that will create real change.

We are also driving to cut red tape for small business. There will be greater standardisation. These things actually mean important things to small business, because they have to deal with local governments; they have to seek approvals. We will be streamlining *al fresco* dining, minor signage and crossovers—these things actually do matter. We will also be standardising across the local government sector in a range of areas so that no matter what area of local government people are in, they can expect the same processes and the same channels. Again, this is particularly important for small business.

I say this: these are significant reforms. They will take time to implement. It will be a phased approach. But let me be very clear: this will mean better local government in Western Australia, better oversight and better transparency, and I believe it will rebuild confidence in the local government sector.