

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES — FUNDING

135. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to proposed changes to the funding of financial counsellors in Western Australia and in particular the impact this will have on financial counselling services in the Peel region.

- (1) How are current and future service levels to be maintained in the Peel region when we are aware that Anglicare WA will be withdrawing one full-time equivalent financial counsellor from the region as of September?
- (2) How can the current services maintain their accredited financial counsellors when there is uncertainty about continuity of contracts and funding levels?
- (3) How can the existing services in the Peel region be expected to maintain and cater for increased demand when there is no new funding proposed for such services in our region?
- (4) What other actions are proposed by government to assist an increasing number of people in the Peel region who face financial crisis but who will not be able to be serviced by current financial counselling services due to long waitlists and because these clients do not fit the criteria for assistance?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY replied:

- (1) No recurrent funding has been withdrawn from Anglicare WA. Current service providers are participating in a preferred service provider process for the provision of ongoing financial counselling services. With the increase in funding provided in July 2011 and the changes to the government procurement processes with the not-for-profit sector, organisations are at liberty to determine their own staffing and service model within their funding amount.
- (2) The new agreements are scheduled to commence on 1 April 2012.

Hon Sue Ellery: So they'll have to do it with less money.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Was it not us that gave \$600 million to the not-for-profit sector? Was it not the Liberal-National government that gave it?

Hon Sue Ellery: Do you think these organisations are happy about you withdrawing the extra funding for counselling? They are not!

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: To continue —

- (3) There is no uncertainty about recurrent funding for these new contracts and funding levels. New signed agreements will commence on 1 April 2012.
- (4) There is continued service provision for financial counselling with the two existing service providers in the Peel region. In addition, there is a financial counselling helpline provided by the Financial Counsellors Association of WA, which provides financial counselling services to people who are unable to visit a financial counsellor. In addition to the funded services and the financial counsellors' helpline, a number of initiatives have been implemented to provide more responsive assistance to people in financial hardship. The hardship utility grant scheme has been enhanced to allow for a more timely response and now provides additional assistance. Financial counselling services are all inclusive to individuals and families experiencing financial hardship.