

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

Fifth Report - "Annual Report 2006-07"

MR A.P. O'GORMAN (Joondalup) [10.09 am]: I present for tabling the fifth report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, entitled "Annual Report 2006-07".

[See paper 3035.]

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: The Community Development and Justice Standing Committee has already completed two inquiries this year. It has held 40 deliberative meetings, taken evidence from 95 people and undertaken investigative travel to a range of intrastate locations. One of those inquiries, the inquiry into Western Australia's natural disaster relief arrangements, was mentioned this morning by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. We have already spoken about that inquiry, and the report has been tabled. I have had some very positive feedback on that report. The community of Western Australia, particularly the rural community, became very involved with that inquiry, and were happy to come and talk to us. The inquiry was referred to the committee by this house, through a motion from the member for Roe, supported by the member for Stirling. The previous inquiry, into the fire and emergency services legislation, was referred to the committee by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the committee was happy to undertake that inquiry. That report was tabled last October, and again we have had some very positive feedback from it.

One of the current inquiries the committee is undertaking was also referred by this house. It deals with the prosecution of assault and sexual offences across the state. A subcommittee has been set up, chaired by the member for Hillarys, and including the members for Churchlands and Maylands. A number of the members of the substantive committee have also taken an interest in that inquiry, and are participating in it. I thank those coopted members for their help with that inquiry. I find it a very difficult inquiry because of the nature of the subject matter, but I believe the report will make some very good recommendations. It has opened all our eyes to the problems of victims of sexual assault in particular, in not only obtaining justice but also getting over the trauma in the long term. I am hopeful that the subcommittee will produce some very good recommendations from that inquiry.

The other inquiry, which is currently being undertaken by the substantive committee, was scoffed at a little in this house when the Speaker read out the terms of reference. Shorthand for the inquiry terms of reference is "joined-up government". When the terms of reference were read in the chamber, a number of members thought it was a bit of a joke, and had a laugh. We have changed the terms of reference slightly to make them more readable for some people, because we did make them sound a bit highbrow. The interesting thing is that since that inquiry was announced I have heard many members talking about just that subject. Members have continually spoken about breaking down the barriers between government departments, and that is what this inquiry is all about. It is about working better across government, particularly in areas such as police and community development. It will be a very worthwhile inquiry when it is completed, and will provide some good direction for departments in breaking down those barriers. We have seen the multifunction police stations in our remote communities, where police, health care workers, education staff, and child protection and community development personnel work together as teams rather than in separate silos. This committee covers 16 portfolio areas, and this inquiry on joined-up government takes in the majority of them. I thank the substantive committee for its perseverance in this inquiry. It is a bit more than perseverance; members of the committee who have been involved in discussions on this inquiry are quite passionate about it. They can see great potential benefits. The deputy chair of the substantive committee, the member for Carine, has just walked into the chamber. The members for Kingsley and Geraldton are also members of the committee, and all contribute very effectively. Because joined-up government is such a large issue, the committee has put together a background paper that is available to all who want it.

I also thank the committee staff. Dr Brian Gordon is the principal research officer at present. He came to us in December last year, and has proven to be a great addition to the committee. Jovita Hogan is the research officer, and she keeps us on track and keeps the information coming to us in a readable format. Many of the inquiries the committee is handling, particularly that into the prosecution of assault and sexual assault, involve quite tedious reading, so Jovita does a great job in keeping that together for us. Our previous principal research officer, Katherine Galvin, helped us through the fire and emergency services inquiry and the first part of the WANDRA inquiry, along with the other research officer we had at the time, Ms Dawn Dickinson. I thank all those staff for their assistance in getting us through the meetings and keeping us well organised. I commend the report to the house.

MRS J. HUGHES (Kingsley) [10.17 am]: This year the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee has worked extremely hard and has come up with some reports that will be of great benefit to the government and to the community of Western Australia. One of the issues facing the committee was that most of its inquiries dealt with only one sector of its portfolio areas, primarily police and emergency services. The

committee was quite concerned about the focus on single areas. However, the time taken to talk to individuals and people who contribute to the safety of the community, such as volunteer firefighters, was of huge importance, and we achieved a very good insight into the way things are on the ground. The committee has done very well there, with the assistance of its staff.

I will raise an issue that the chairman has already touched on; that is, the inquiry into joined-up government. This is a very exciting inquiry. When I was working in local government one of the main issues I faced was that most functions worked in the silos. Planning did not work with the environment people, and the environment people did not work with community development, and so on. As a result, no really good decisions were being made because matters were not being looked at holistically. Now that I work in the state government, I find that many of the issues facing my office daily, whether they be about housing or planning, span several areas. How do we obtain the information we need to help investigate and fix issues? More often than not we need to go through two or three departments to gain some sort of understanding of how to move forward. I am very hopeful that this inquiry will open up some opportunities for government departments to work more collaboratively, rather than in the silos. The issue is not to create super ministries; it is to create agencies that talk to one another, sit down together and try to come up with solid answers. For instance, issues in education include truancy and children coming to school without lunches. Often those children end up on the street, and then they become issues for police and, eventually, community services. We hope that all of these issues can be looked at to find ways to streamline the process and make it work. Among issues that may be brought into line are climate change and environment, which are among the big topics these days. Fixing climate change and the environment is not just about the Minister for the Environment sitting up and saying that it will be done; a lot more work needs to be done. We need to have in play planning people, the Minister for Energy and local government. We need householders to find out where they can get relevant information. We need builders to know how they can build energy efficient houses. We need people to find out how to create alternative energy and pump green energy into the grid. We need these collaborative approaches to make climate change less of an issue. Through our committee's inquiry into collaborative approaches in government, and finding out how other places in the world make these things work, I hope we can assist this government and other tiers of government, such as local government, to get some real benefit from making these policies work.

Another issue that we face is homelessness and housing affordability. We all know it is a huge issue. It has to do with community development and poverty. We must ask how we house affected people, where we house them, what size house they require and whether they need to be re-educated and found new employment opportunities. In a state like ours, in which there are huge employment opportunities, we still see homelessness. We are not able to address the issue because we do not necessarily have interfacing structures in place that will make the desired outcomes possible. The state has wonderful Foundation Housing and community housing, and the people involved in those organisations are doing a marvellous job. Other groups in the community are forming committees to bring agencies and departments together. It may be that through its inquiry the committee can show a way in which the government can benefit by doing such work on a much bigger scale. Communities can benefit a great deal by having such groups come together. For example, the member for Girrawheen has a group in her electorate that has for some time brought together people from the Department of Housing and Works, local school groups, parents and citizens associations, Mercy House and other places to address the issues at an electorate level. This approach is working extremely well. If we can expand that idea, we might make it work for government. We might find out how other governments are making that approach successful. This is a huge task, involving changing cultures in organisations and different departments. Each agency has its own personality and its own way of doing things. We need to find ways to change their cultures that do not threaten any particular agency. That will be of great importance to the question of how to restructure. The question of whether the government chooses to restructure could also be an issue. The government might be quite happy to retain the current approach, and an outcome of this inquiry may be that the way in which the government is doing it is more beneficial.

I commend the work that my colleagues on the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee have been doing. I am very pleased that we have undertaken this inquiry into collaborative approaches in government and look forward to what emerges from it. I thank Dr Brian Gordon, who has worked very hard on putting this report together and has helped us to hopefully deliver an excellent outcome with this report.