

CITY OF BELMONT, INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS

1206. Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development:

- (1) Since the minister tabled the report of his department into the City of Belmont, has he received further complaints against the city or its officers?
- (2) If yes, has a decision been made to formally investigate those complaints?
- (3) If yes to (2), what will be the form of that investigation and when does the minister anticipate the investigation will be finalised?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1)-(3) The local government portfolio receives a constant flow of complaints every day of the week from one end of the State to the other on the workings of local government and allegations of its failure at good governance. If I receive these complaints, I refer them to the department unless they involve the department. Occasionally they involve the department and I look for someone else to examine them.

Hon Barry House: Sometimes you handball them.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Sometimes I try to find other people to look after the complaints. Through a committee of the House, Hon Barry House is examining one of those issues. I thank him for that; he will do the State and local government a great service.

Complaints are often examined to see whether on their face they require an inquiry under the terms of the statute; that is, an inquiry by an authorised person set up under the statute by virtue of a decision of the Director General of the Department of Local Government and Regional Development. In the case of Belmont, there was an inquiry. That inquiry was extraordinary because it took on the form and style that was suggested in the report of the inquiry into the City of South Perth, which recommended that a lot of work be done in the authorised process inquiry. However, that proved much more difficult than anyone had envisaged. The authorised process inquiry was completed and the report has been tabled. I have required the City of Belmont to take particular actions in a number of areas and I have given it a finite period in which to act upon those requests.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: It has.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: It has advised me that it will; I have not received formal advice that it has. No doubt it will get on with -

Hon Jim Scott: Have they employed someone to refute all these -

Hon TOM STEPHENS: No, the City of Belmont has employed a communications officer for the shire. There is nothing extraordinary about that. Good governance requires people who can communicate between the local government and its ratepayers. The City of Belmont has done that. These issues, with regard to the matters that were the subject of exhaustive investigation and subsequent findings, are behind us, although some repetition of those issues has emerged in ongoing complaints by parties who are not satisfied with the outcome. Unless there was any new material -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Not new matters.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Some new matters as well. To the extent that the Government is left with the task of sifting through these issues and identifying those new matters or old matters about which there is new information, the Government will work its way through those issues, which will take time. The member should be aware that that is no different from the circumstances that relate to any one of 142 councils around local government at any time. There is some hyperactivity over the complaints about Belmont. Those issues have received a lot of attention. The Government is working its way through the complaints. I do not suggest for one minute that some of the complaints do not detail serious matters. I am pleased that the City of Belmont has increasingly tackled these issues with a growing level of appreciation of their seriousness. I am looking forward to cultural change within the City of Belmont, which has come about as a result of the exhaustive and comprehensive authorised persons inquiry.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: May I conclude that there is a non-formal inquiry under way?

Hon Tom Stephens: There is no formal inquiry.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Hon Derrick Tomlinson!