

COMMUNITY-BASED CHILDCARE CENTRES —ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT

691. Ms S.F. McGURK to the Minister for Women's Interests:

I refer to the Committee for Perth's report, "Filling the Pool", on Western Australia's wide and persistent gender pay gap, which identified the lack of suitable and affordable child care as a key block to women's full participation in the labour market. What is the Minister for Women's Interests doing to reverse the cuts to accommodation support for 32 community-based childcare centres that threaten to push up fees for thousands of families or force those centres to close?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

Although I have an active interest in this matter as Minister for Women's Interests, the question should have been more appropriately directed to the Minister for Local Government; Community Services.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: As Minister for Women's Interests, I can answer this question because I take an active interest in the availability of childcare places in Western Australia for working women. Yes, the member is right: the Committee for Perth's "Filling the Pool" report identified that one of the key inhibitors to women participating in the workforce in Western Australia is access to affordable and convenient childcare facilities. The issue to which the member referred affects around 33 childcare centres across the state. Western Australia has 1 137 childcare centres across Western Australia, and 33 centres are affected.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle, I call you to order for the first time. You have asked a question; let the minister answer it.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Effectively, back in the 1980s when there was a significant lack of available childcare in Western Australia, the Department of Local Government and Communities entered into leasing arrangements with some of the local governments around the state to provide peppercorn leases to childcare facilities in certain areas to try to get some capacity in the childcare market.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Department of Local Government and Communities is the regulator of childcare centres. It has looked at this arrangement and determined that being the regulator of childcare centres, subsidising childcare centres through this arrangement is not appropriate. As a result, it is now moving into negotiations with the childcare facilities and the local governments involved to have the childcare facilities enter into the leasing arrangement directly with the owner of the facility, rather than having the Department of Local Government and Communities as the intermediary. It is entirely appropriate. The childcare facilities will not be closed. The funding arrangements that they have with the government will remain.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle, I call you to order for the second time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The subsidies to work around \$1.4 million will still flow to those centres. What will happen is that the centres will have a leasing arrangement with the owner of the venue they operate within, not with the Department of Local Government and Communities as an intermediary between those venue holders.