

LOCAL GOVERNMENT — REFORMS

144. Mr T.J. HEALY to the Minister for Local Government:

I refer to today's delivery of another McGowan Labor government election commitment—to reform the Local Government Act.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how these reforms will support local government representatives in their role to serve the community?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how these changes will add to the government's record of reform in the sector and address the previous Liberal–National government's failure?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member, I know it is going to be a long speech, so I want to settle everyone down. Members, be quiet, please.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

I thank the member for his anticipatory question; it is good to have an anticipatory question.

- (1)–(2) After question time, I look forward to introducing a third reform.

Point of Order

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I seek your clarification, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Sit down, minister. That is you!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: We are hearing about an announcement that has not yet been made. It is misleading if it has not been brought to Parliament.

The SPEAKER: No, it does not have to be brought to Parliament to be an announcement.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: That is what he just said.

The SPEAKER: It is not a point of order. You are confusing me even more.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: With great anticipation, I thank the member for Southern River, who was a distinguished councillor before he entered this place. I would also like to acknowledge the Mayor of South Perth, and the deputy mayor and the chief executive officer. In answer to the second part of the member's question. The only disappointing thing for me personally that came out of the former government's reform of local government was the failure to amalgamate Victoria Park and South Perth, only on the point that we could have attracted worldwide attention had we ended up with the "City of South Park". That would have been a very interesting marketing tool for tourism, Minister for Tourism.

Mr P. Papalia: I'd support it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I was at a function only recently with the Mayor of South Perth and I indicated to her that that was the only disappointing factor and that that could have been the only saving thing out of the failed reform program of the previous government. As members know, the previous government's only attempt to reform local government in any significant way was a failed and botched process of forced amalgamations upon local governments in the metropolitan area. The people spoke during that process, as we are aware. However, the highly anticipated local government bill that I am looking forward to introducing—we were a bit distracted this morning, as you know, Mr Speaker —

The SPEAKER: Yes, mainly by you.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We spent about four and a half hours on a motion that the opposition had some disagreement on. It is very important to note that the third piece of legislation that I will introduce to the house shortly will do some very important and significant things in the overall reform of local government in Western Australia. The member knows that we introduced the bill that set up a key role for the Auditor General to have auditing oversight of local governments across Western Australia, including performance audits. That process is ongoing; it was an important reform. The second, of course, was the suspension and dismissal legislation amendment, which allows the minister of the day to address individual councillors when there is a serious breach of behaviour and competency. Of course, that is an important reform because, under the current act, I, as the Minister for Local Government, can deal with only serious malfunctions of a council and deal with the entire council. That is unfair, because if an individual is causing issues, we should be able to deal with the individual.

Extract from *Hansard*

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Mr Terry Healy; Mr David Templeman; Mr Sean L'Estrange

The reform that I will read into the house later today will do a couple of important things. Firstly, it will introduce measures to support council members in the transparent employment and performance review of chief executive officers, making sure that all councillors have a role in that very important process. Secondly, it will ensure that there is a revised gift provision for transparency, which of course we know caused a whole range of issues over a period of time for many elected members. One key aspect of the legislation is a regime of universal training. This is really important. It is universal training for both candidates who are seeking to be elected and, of course, those who are successful at an election. This is based upon the principle that essentially we want to make sure that all councillors, upon their election, are well versed—there will be a training requirement in those first 12 months—in the important role and responsibilities that they hold and that, indeed, they have a good understanding of their financial responsibilities, the financial decision-making they will make on behalf of ratepayers, the strategic planning responsibilities they will have and, of course, the appropriate governance responsibility they will have as elected members. Universal training was talked about for over a decade. The previous government, of course, did nothing. We are moving to deal with it. In two years, we have already had two pieces of legislation go through; this is the third. In the former government's eight and half years, not a thing was done—not a thing did it do! All it did was a bit of windbagging. There were, I think, four Ministers for Local Government under the former regime, and none of them were very successful, except for the former member for Bunbury —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, a bit of quiet. Minister, you have been going for six minutes now, other ministers want to get a question in.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will conclude. The former member for Bunbury, who used to sit over there, his answer to most questions of him would start with “Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.” That was his response to any question made to him.

We are already moving through the reform. I hope that the opposition will support these reforms. They have broad support across the sector. They are focused on ensuring greater transparency in the sector. Of course, I remind members that the second phase of the review of the Local Government Act is currently underway. We are getting submissions from all spectrums; it is creating a lot of interest. Those submissions close at the end of this month. I encourage people of all persuasions and from all backgrounds to have their say, because this is a very important moment in time for reforming a very significant level of government in Western Australia that we want to see delivering high-quality decision-making and governance to the people of Western Australia.